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MAKING OF LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS

HOW STORMFRONT STUDIOS ADAPTED PETER JACKSON'S EPIC TO CONSOLES

THE EVOLUTION OF

THE ORIGINAL

Micro Machines

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JET SET WILLY

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ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS

DOCTOR WHO AND THE MINES OF TERROR

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THE DIGITAL CLASSICS INSPIRED BY FRANK HERBERT'S EPIC SCI-FI SERIES

THE HISTORY OF PSYCHONAUTS

TIM SCHAFER REVISITS HIS MIND-BENDING SERIES

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MICRO MACHINES GAME

DARRAN JONES

It's *Micro Machines: Turbo Tournament 96* for me. I'm still laughing to myself over my last sponge duel with the team.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing:
Jurassic Park: The Game
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

TIM EMPEY

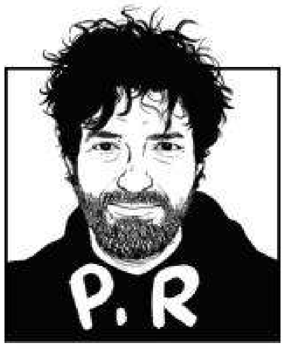
I've mentioned it before, but I had a lot of fun lunchtimes playing *Micro Machines V4* in the office. The Plasma Cannon absolutely rules.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
Currently playing:
Halo Infinite
Favourite game of all time:
God Hand

NICK THORPE

I actually quite liked all the added power-ups of *Micro Machines V3*, and fortunately I have a PlayStation multitap.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Now playing:
Pokémon Shining Pearl
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

ANDY SALTER

The first *Micro Machines* game for the Mega Drive. Never been a huge fan of racing games but it felt more like a party game.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord…* Modded of course
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War



PAUL ROSE

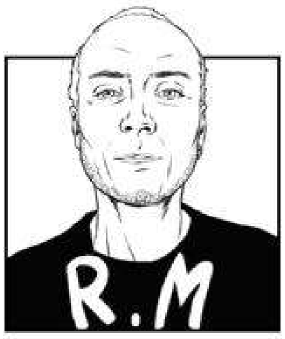
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament, for the hours we lost on it in the *Digitiser* office.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Civilisation VI*
Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

PAUL DRURY

Definitely *Micro Machines 2* on the Mega Drive, with the ingenious J-Cart set up and the pad-share feature. Many happy hours of play with frenemies.
Expertise: Videogame nasties
Currently playing:
Pokémon Brilliant Diamond
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

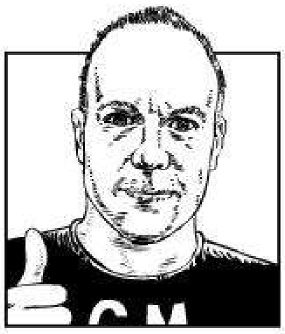
HARETH AL BUSTANI

It's got to be *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*. A fantastic sequel and great fun to play.
Expertise: Juggling obscure games, words and guitar and seeing where it all lands
Currently Playing: *Chivalry 2*
Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island



RORY MILNE

I love the whole series, but I always find myself returning to the NES original for its devious track layouts, responsive handling and above all the thrill of its two-player races.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing:
Earthworm Jim
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest



GRAEME MASON

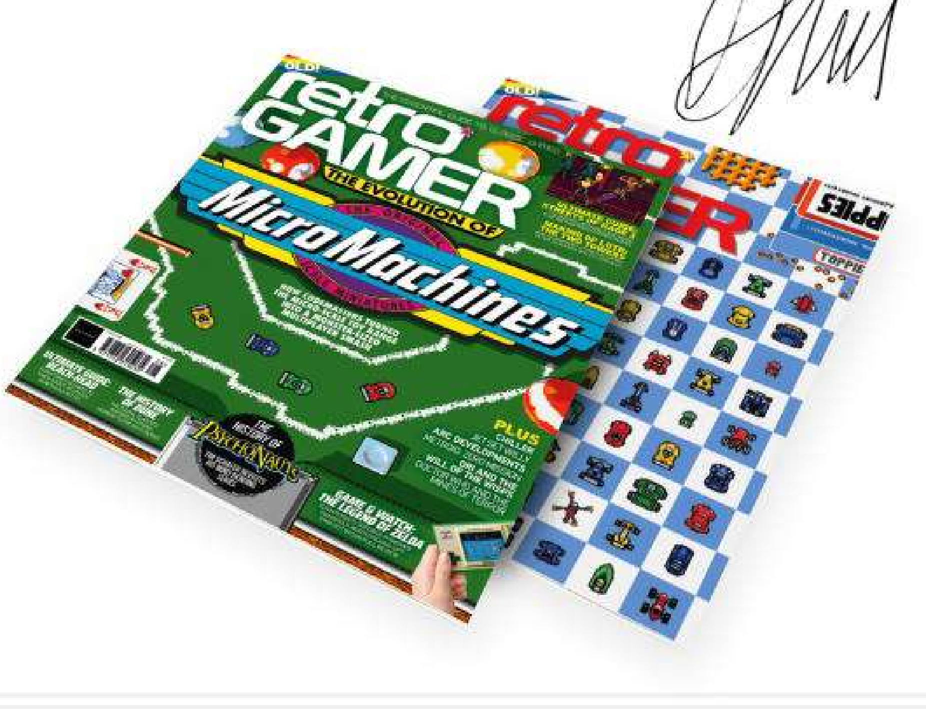
I spent weeks on the original Mega Drive game. Finally you could drive around a pool table!
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Dying Light*
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4

LOADING...

Long before lockdown was a thing, members of the team would visit my house and we'd have gaming sessions in my shed. The focus would always be on multiplayer games and *Micro Machines*, specifically *Micro Machines: Turbo Tournament 96*, would get played. Those sessions would end in chaos and sometimes arguments, but they were always fun. After all, while *Micro Machines* was a laugh when playing by yourself, it was always elevated when played with mates. It's a delight then, to not only feature the series on our cover, but to chat with the developers who have been involved with the franchise since it made its debut in 1991.

If top-down racers aren't your thing there's plenty more to enjoy in our last issue of 2021. Howell Ivy chats to us about the controversial arcade game *Chiller*, we speak to the talented coders responsible for turning Frank Herbert's *Dune* into a videogame series and Tim Schafer reveals how the *Psychonauts* series evolved. There's plenty more as well, including Ultimate Guides on *Ridge Racer Revolution*, *Beach-Head* and *Streets Of Rage 3*, the story behind *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror*, as well as how Stormfront Studios adapted *Peter Jackson's The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* to consoles.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine,
Darran



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If you enjoy arcade racers you're in good company - Iain loves them, too

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Just because games look hyper realistic now, it doesn't mean they're better

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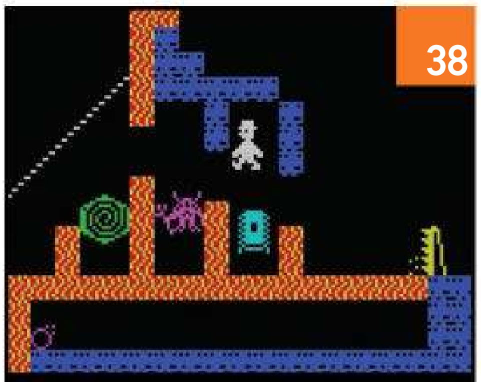
Nick once again bravely travels through time as Darran gets car sick



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Darran was really moved by his encounter with the arcade game *Berzerk*. It spoke to him on a higher level

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Did you ever attempt to map classic videogames? Darran did, and it didn't always go well

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Golf may have been boring to a young Nick, but he found out that *Neo Turf Masters* was anything but dull

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Looking for a cool Japanese exclusive to play on your Saturn? Nick would like to recommend this impressive port

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There are plenty of great remakes of classic games, but this spectacular effort from Nintendo R&D1 is one of Darran's favourites

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We love Sega's wonderful arcade racer, so we thought we'd share some of its best bits

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Nick is back with another selection of games that never left the arcade

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Discover how a group of Elite staff left to start their own company

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The Atari add-on that looked like a toilet. But did it perform like one?

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We chat to the developers who were tasked with turning Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi novels into exciting videogames

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Sam Beddoes chat to us about his entertaining run-and-gun platformer

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Nick slips on his driving gloves and tears up the asphalt of this Playstation sequel

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Aaron Potter reveals why Moon Studios' ambitious sequel is a must own

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Learn how sprite trickery and a love of *Golden Axe* created this fun hack-and-slash

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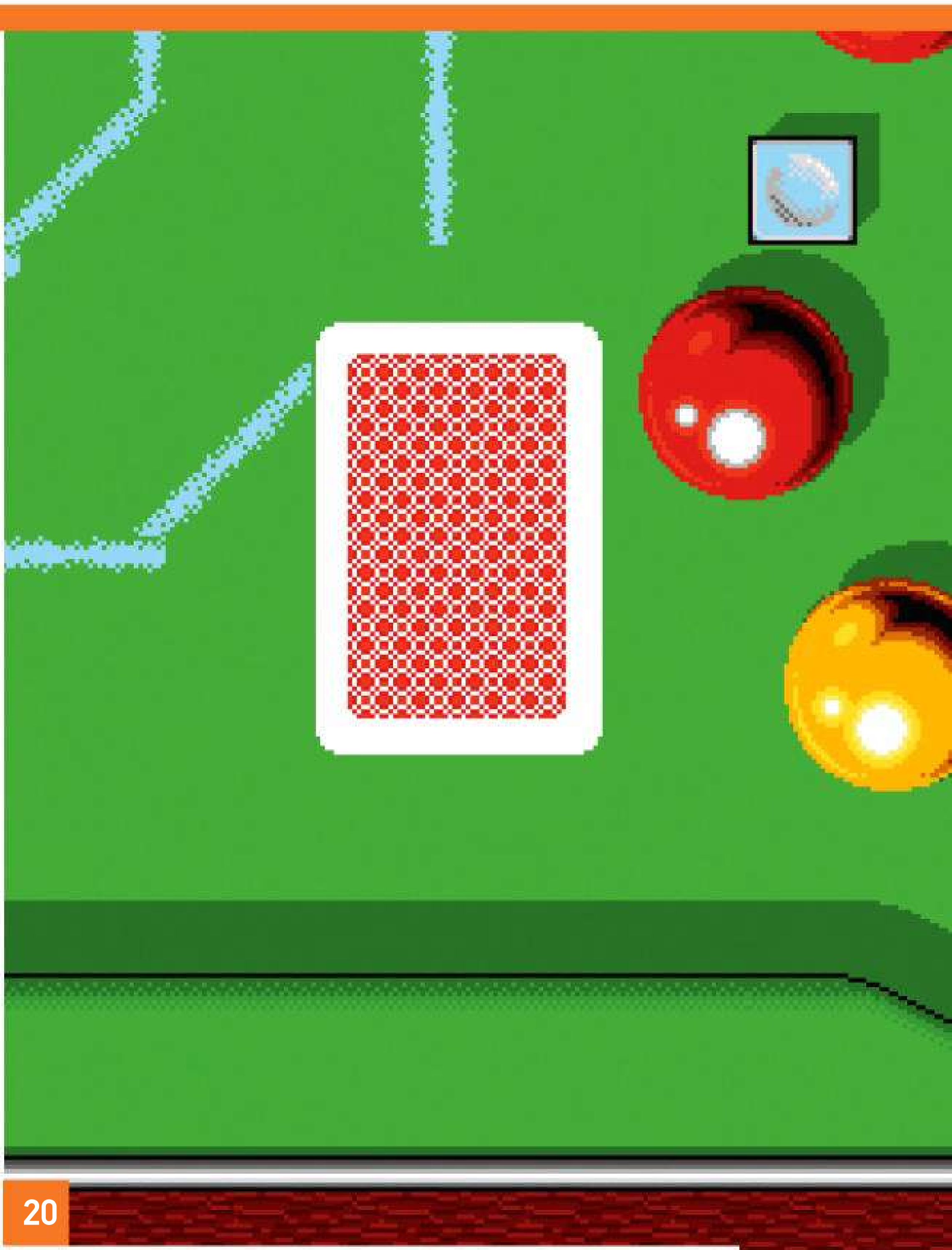

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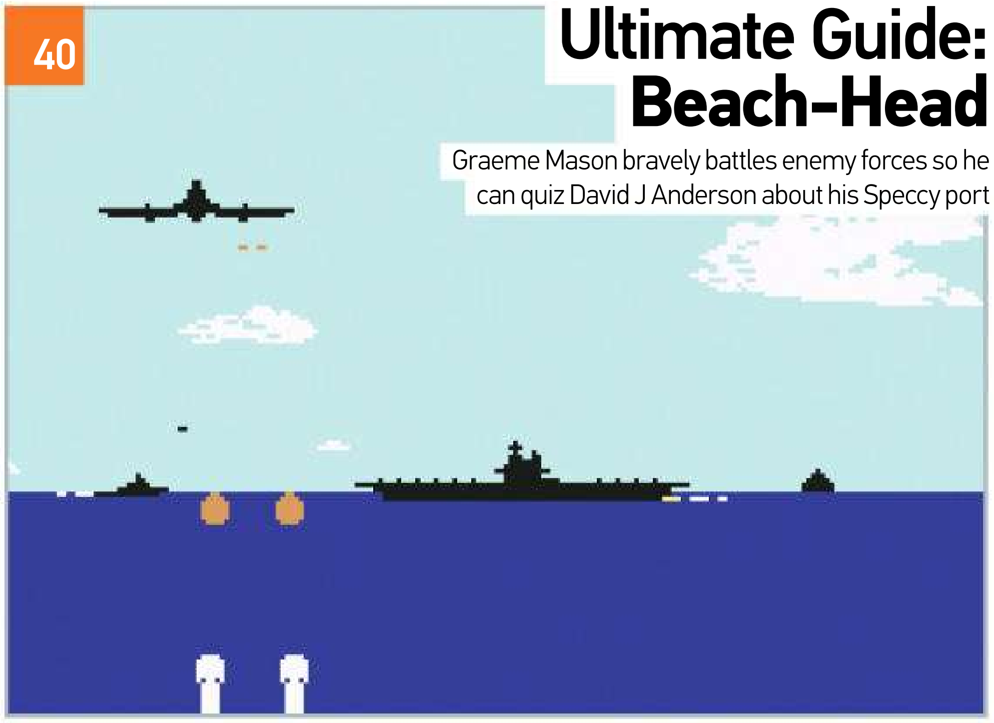
Veterans behind the hit multiplayer game explain how the series has evolved since it made its exciting debut on the NES



40 Ultimate Guide: Beach-Head
Graeme Mason bravely battles enemy forces so he can quiz David J Anderson about his Speccy port

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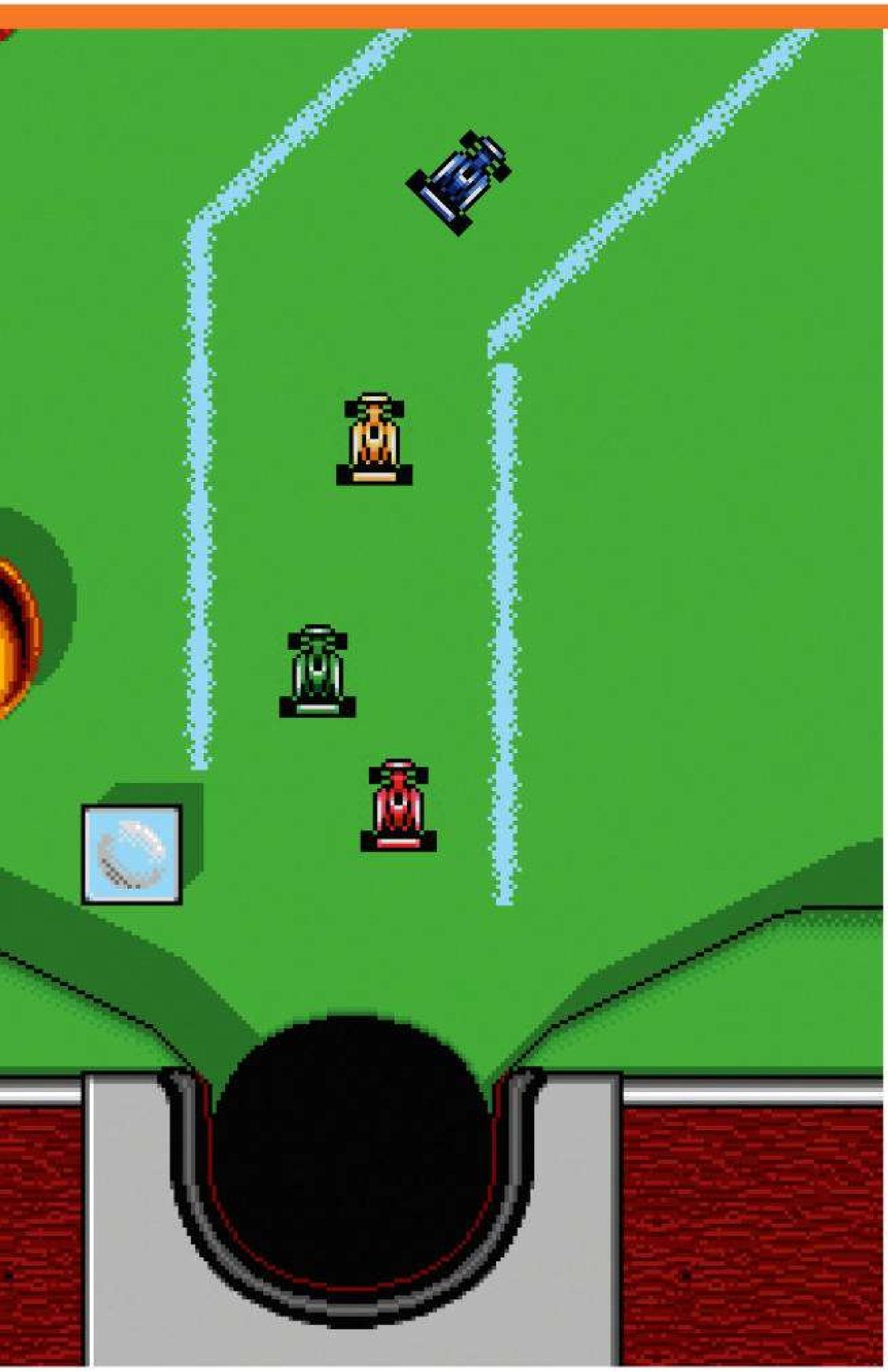

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The boys love a good gas and this month they've decided to chat about the many games they never got around to finishing

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Peter Chrichard is a huge fan of Nintendo and he's got an amazing gaming room to proved it

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It turns out that Nick loves nothing more than a good digital rumble. This month he looks at his impressive fighting collection

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The year is nearly over but your letters keep flooding in. Keep them coming, we really enjoy reading them

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Darran rarely pulls rank on Nick, but he'll do it in an instant if it means not completing a game

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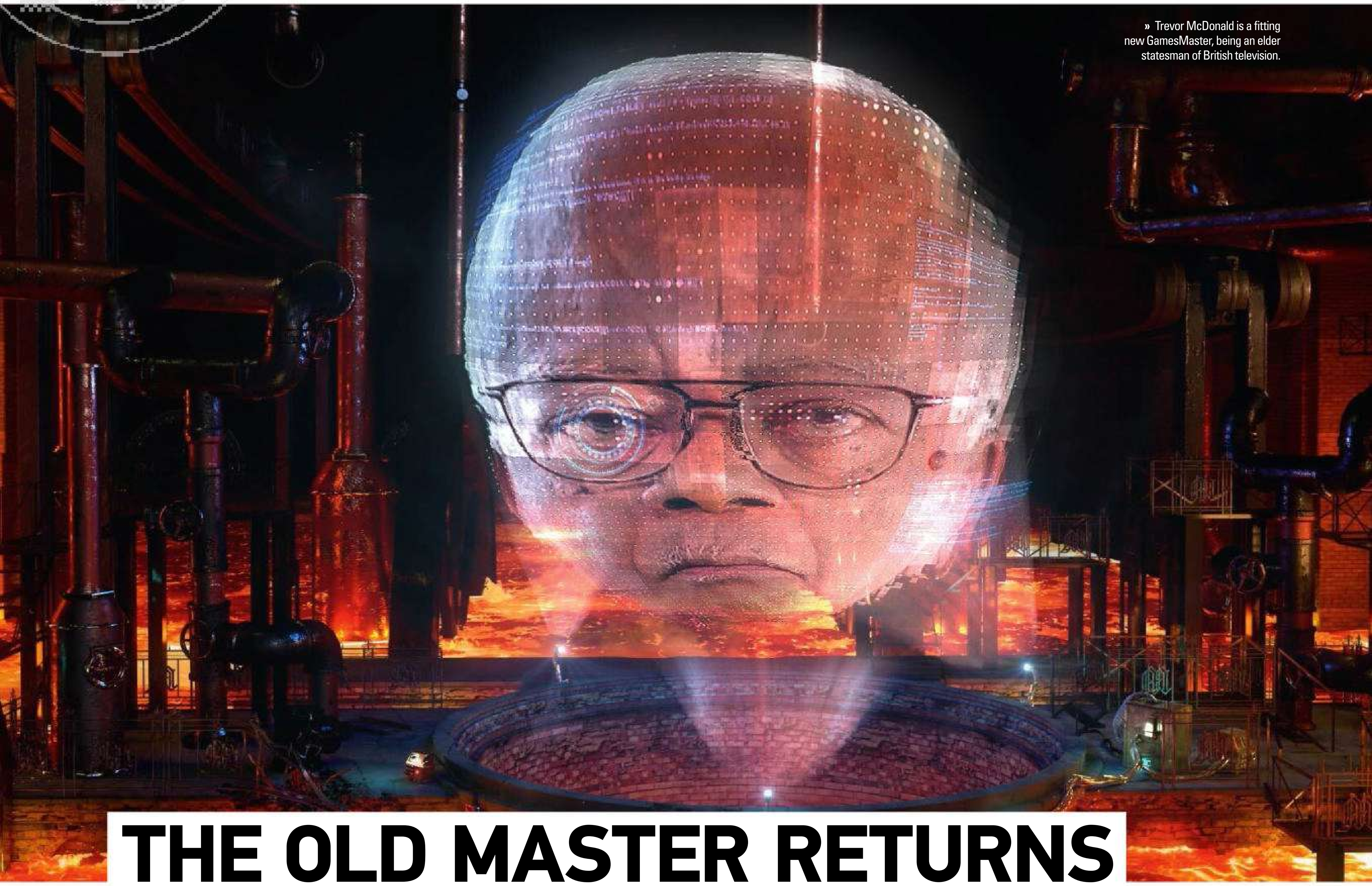
The Making Of: Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror

Gary Partis explains how he found himself creating a brand-new adventure for the popular Time Lord



» Trevor McDonald is a fitting new GamesMaster, being an elder statesman of British television.

THE OLD MASTER RETURNS

We speak to GamesMaster's new presenters about the revived show

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Our resident columnist enjoys a good arcade racer , but not one of those boring sims like *Gran Turismo*

12 MR BIFFO
Would Paul really take *Far Cry 6* over *Midwinter*? It depends on his age

14 A MOMENT WITH
Anthony and Nicola Caulfield discuss their new Spectrum documentary

16 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
It's March 2005, so Nick plays *Resident Evil 4* and other goodies

It's a good time to be a fan of *GamesMaster*. If you were one of the millions of gamers captivated by the original run from 1992 to 1998, you're probably already aware of presenter Dominik Diamond's forthcoming book about the show. But now *GamesMaster* is back, with a brand-new look and a whole new set of presenters, including Trevor McDonald who succeeds the late Patrick Moore as the GamesMaster. On the ground, duties are handled by Rab Florence of *Consolevania* and *VideoGaiden* fame, award-winning esports host Frankie Ward and the Instagram comedian Ty Logan.

Upon welcoming viewers to the studio, Rab describes the revival as an "attempt to destroy the nostalgic memories of middle-aged men". Ironically that displays a reverence for the original format – you could easily imagine former host Dominik Diamond saying exactly the same thing – and it's heartening to see that the show sticks to what worked in the Nineties, with a similar mix of studio challenges and outside features and reviews. Of course, back in the Nineties it was hard to find videogaming shows to watch, whereas today we have endless options on Twitch and YouTube. Rab doesn't see that as a problem, though. "This is the weird thing, I'm not really into watching people play videogames. I'm always wanting to grab the controller," he says. "I think that these days, the audience is more attuned to watching people play videogames than they ever were before. So it's a strange thing, maybe the format was actually a wee bit ahead of its time."

> "I think that these days, the audience is more attuned to watching people play videogames than they ever were before"
> **RAB FLORENCE**

But that's not the only thing that has changed, as streaming and social media have created a new breed of contestant. "These days, there are so many people that are just TV ready – they're ready for audiences, they know how to present themselves, they're super professional," Rab continues. "Everybody talks about how funny Dominik was, and he was, but see that thing he did where he could handle uncooperative guests so well and

GAMESMASTER

» Here's the new presenting team – from left to right, Frankie Ward, Rab Florence and Ty Logan.

make it work as TV? It was magic, so I remember thinking to myself, 'That's the main thing I've got to get right, when a guest comes on and they're nervous, and they're not saying anything.' And it didn't happen, you couldn't shut them up!"

If you previously watched *GamesMaster* for impressive feats of gaming, like Martin Mathers' attempt to play two *Virtua Cop 2* machines simultaneously, you'll be well catered for here. The first episode sees Ty visiting multiple Twin Galaxies world record holder Sam Tuff to check out his *Beat Saber* prowess. "He's something else, he's almost like a robot – he can't be real," he tells us. To put it into context, a number of other players are shown trying the same song and most of them don't even survive for ten seconds, while Sam manages to complete a full combo. "I want people to try doing the challenges – they might watch it, see the challenge and think, 'You know what, let me give it a go,'" Ty enthuses. "Hopefully people will tag us or tag the show and say, 'Look, I completed the challenge!'"

One thing you shouldn't expect to see is any SNES games this series. "We don't really do retro games on this series of *GamesMaster*, but we do include games that are rooted in history, like *Street Fighter*, like *Mortal Kombat* and *Tekken*," says Frankie. "*Super Mario 3D World*, that's in the first episode – I think it was 2013 that came out originally on the Wii U? So it's not all just new, new, new games – even though they're games that you can get very easily nowadays, there are still those games that have that kind of legacy behind them." That's not to say there's no sense of history, though. "There's a *Street Fighter V* challenge between two mates who used to end their nights out early so they could go back and play *Street Fighter II*," says Frankie. "I think that's what *GamesMaster* is all about as well, it's about people who have been living and breathing and carrying those game franchises with them."

The show has had to tread a fine line between appealing to old fans and being relevant to today's audience,"If you can appeal to people's sense of nostalgia while also including their next generation of people that they're bringing along, I think that's always nice," says Rab. "There will be a lot of cases, I think, where somebody my age who remembers *GamesMaster* when they were a kid will watch with their teenage kid or 12-year-old kid and they'll know one of these streamers or content creators, and be able to explain that to their dad or their mum. I think it's great that there's that kind of cross-generational feel to it."

All three episodes of the new series of *GamesMaster* are available to watch now via the E4 YouTube channel and the All4 on demand service. ✱

» Frankie has hosted esports events including Intel Extreme Masters, and even Future's own PC Gaming Show at E3.

» If you're not familiar with Rab's work in gaming TV, you might know him from the BBC Scotland comedy show *Burnistoun*.

» Ty's quite adventurous, getting involved in the challenges himself – his 15 seconds on *Beat Saber* were actually impressive!

SHIPPING FORECAST

The long-awaited Analogue Pocket has finally got a shipping date, with the first units due to go out on 13 December 2021. The unit is an FPGA-based handheld that plays Game Boy, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance games, as well as a variety of others via separately available adapters. We've got one, so look for a review next issue. The first Evercade VS units have also started to arrive with eager gamers, with buyers of the Founders Edition first in line. However, not all units are expected to ship in 2021, with American players set to wait until 2022 for their systems.

ULTRA POWER

Last year we reviewed the Polymega, a CD-based retro console that uses a variety of Element Module add-ons to add support for various cartridge systems. The console shipped earlier this year after major delays, and the first new Element Module has been announced for 2022. It's a particularly exciting one since it will add N64 cartridge support, which isn't yet commonplace in commercial retro consoles. We'll keep an eye on this to see how well the support holds up.

» We can't wait to get back to playing classics like *Alien Breed* and *Worms: The Director's Cut.*

NEW A500 MINI GAMES ANNOUNCED

While we knew that next year's A500 Mini would feature 25 games, not all of them were announced. Although we're still currently waiting for the last three Amiga games to be added, the 22 currently revealed games suggest a good mix of genres, with recent reveals including *Qwak*, *Lost Patrol*, *Super Cars II* and *Titus The Fox*. These join classics such as *Alien Breed*, *Worms: The Director's Cut*, *Another World*, *Simon The Sorcerer*, *Speedball 2*, *The Chaos Engine* and *Pinball Dreams*. Expect more news on the system in upcoming issues.

RETRO ASYLUM TURNS TEN

We know you love reading about retro games, but if you love listening to fans chat about them, you really should check out the Retro Asylum podcast. It's the UK's longest running podcast about retro gaming and recently celebrated its tenth anniversary, which is quite the achievement. What's refreshing about Retro Asylum is it's far more computer focused than many of its peers, meaning it's great if you want to hear lots of nostalgic reminiscing about the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad. Head to retroasylum.com and join in the celebrations.

LATEST PODCAST!

GAMING LEGENDS WE'VE LOST

THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY MOURNS THE PASSING OF TALENTED VETERANS

In recent times, the retro gaming community has lost some phenomenally talented people. Game designer Bernie Drummond, Imagine Software cofounder David Lawson, PR veteran Jonathan Fargher and prominent ZX Spectrum enthusiast Darren Pearcy have all sadly passed away. Yet their lives and work will be long remembered.

Bernie Drummond was the artist behind a string of classic 8-bit games including Batman, *Head Over Heels* and *Match Day II*. He deliberately failed his art CSE, believing formal tuition to be a waste of time. But, by doing things his own way, he developed a style of isometric 3D that improved graphically on previous attempts, most notably Ultimate's *Knight Lore*.

Before working on *Batman* in 1986, Bernie had never even seen a computer game. His early inspiration had been the American comic-book artist Neal Adams who pencilled several issues of *X-Men*. Yet, in collaboration with friend and programmer Jon Ritman, Bernie was given free rein in a partnership built on trust. "I'd just draw, letting my imagination fly," he once said.

Bernie also wrote some of the code for *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* – the latter widely considered to be the ZX Spectrum's best isometric platform game ("the graphics are really very special", gushed a review in *Sinclair User*). *Match Day II* was the pair's biggest commercial success, but despite his work being widely acclaimed, Bernie was nevertheless surprised at how well his work was received saying he never had an ambition to be an artist.

David Lawson, meanwhile, did have an ambition: he wanted to create a great software house. In 1982, aged 23, he cofounded Imagine Software in Liverpool along with Mark Butler and Eugene Evans. But while it became a prolific publisher of 8-bit games (with David working on the likes of *Arcadia*, *Zzoom*, *Schizoids* and *Ah Diddums*) it ended up financially collapsing in July 1984 – just as a BBC camera crew was filming at the company's plush four-storey offices.

Even so, David wasn't ready to quit the industry. He cofounded Psygnosis with Ian Hetherington and Jonathan Ellis where he worked on *Brataccas*, *Barbarian* and *Obliterator*. Psygnosis was a huge success, later becoming a subsidiary of Sony Computer Entertainment and known for franchises such as *WipEout* and *Colony Wars*. "David was brilliant and remarkable because he was entirely self-taught," says Eugene Evans, in tribute. David was just 62.

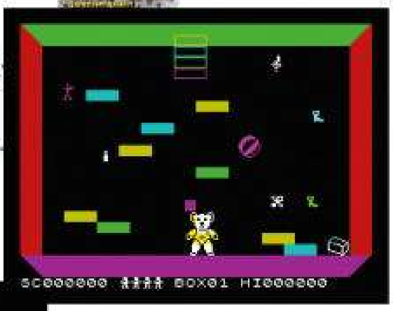
Jonathan Fargher also worked at Psygnosis. He began his career as the company's UK PR manager in 1994 and remained there for 15 years before becoming UK head of consumer PR for PlayStation. From 2013, he was head of UK communications for Activision, leaving in August 2021 to become director of UK corporate communications for Ubisoft. Aged only 46, he had worked on some of the industry's biggest brands.

Darren Pearcy operated behind the scenes, too, making a big impact by stepping up to rescue the Speccy Spoilers website following the death of James Langmead. He then set up its spiritual successor, the RZX Archive which featured playthroughs of hundreds of ZX Spectrum games which could be downloaded into modern emulators and watched, backed by a popular YouTube channel.

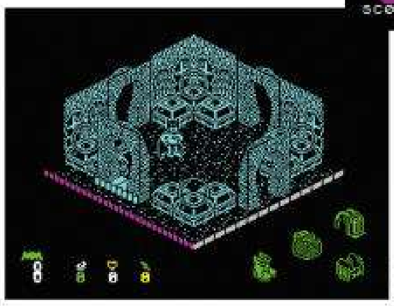
"I met him via the comp.sys.sinclair usenet newsgroup and on IRC in the speccy channel in the early Noughties," says friend Mal Franks. "I met up with him several times in Manchester and Liverpool with other people associated with the newsgroup and ZX Spectrum scene. He was very friendly, great to chat with and his love of the ZX Spectrum influenced his career as a programmer. He will be very much missed." Our thoughts go out to all the friends and families of these gaming legends. ✱

RZX Archive
SPECTRUM

» The RZX Archive, run by Darren Pearcy, brought together dozens of recordings of Spectrum games.



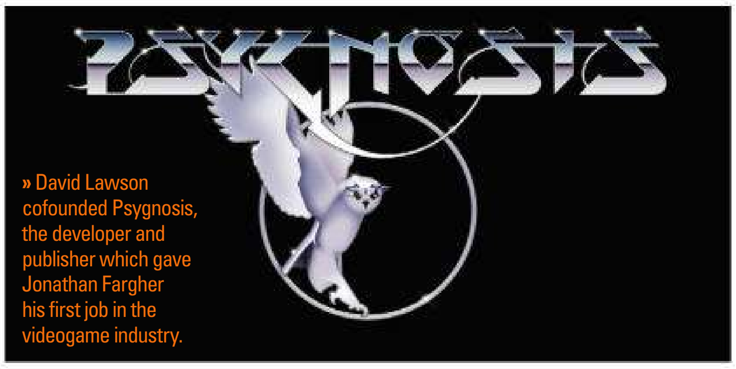
» [ZX Spectrum] *Batman*, published by Ocean, was Bernie Drummond's debut game – rated 93% in *Crash* magazine



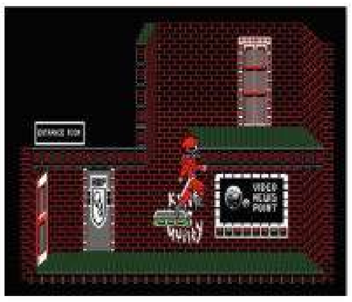
» [ZX Spectrum] *Ah Diddums*, released in 1983, was designed by David Lawson and Mark Butler.

» Forming a dream team: Jon Ritman (left) and Bernie Drummond (right) worked on some of gaming's classic titles.

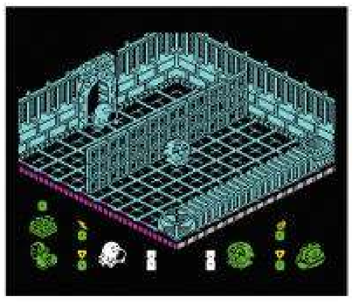
» Mark Butler (left) and David Lawson are in Liverpool during their time heading up Imagine Software.



» David Lawson cofounded Psygnosis, the developer and publisher which gave Jonathan Fargher his first job in the videogame industry.



» [Amiga] *Brataccas* was Psygnosis' first published game – created from the ashes of Imagine Software's *Bandersnatch*.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Head Over Heels* is one of the finest isometric 3D games ever created.

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Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Baby you can drive my car

I am very excited. There is a brand-new *Forza Horizon* game out. I've never played a *Forza Horizon* game before, and that is because I am an idiot. For some reason I got it into my head that, like *Forza*, it was a dry racing game, similar to *Gran Turismo*. I should clarify, I've not played *Gran Turismo* since the first one where you spent hours trying to earn a licence, so who knows, maybe *Gran Turismo* isn't that dry anymore.

Anyway, it turns out *Forza Horizon* is NOT a boring racing sim and is a lot more arcadey. When I heard this, a little shiver went up my spine. I'd forgotten just how much I used to LOVE driving games. From a very early age, they were always my favourite genre.

My first driving game experience was *Sprint 2*. This beautiful black and white beast of a machine was magnificent. It had actual steering wheels on it and sat amongst the other games like some big, old, wise Buddah. I'm actually getting emotional because I just remembered I used to play this with my dad. I think I've written before that my parents never played videogames, but suddenly I'm transported to Rose's travelling fair on the field at the back of the Britwell Estate in Slough. It is so noisy, deafening there, and a bit scary for a seven-year-old boy. But I'm stood next to my dad, and we are driving and I feel like a big man. Incredibly difficult game to play but a beautiful moment for a boy and his dad.

Wow. That was actual time-travel typing that. I'm in Costa and I've just had to pop to the toilet to wipe my eyes. What happened there?

The next driving game to excite me was *Pole Position*. Thinking back, not a great game, but I guess it was colour and the sounds were pretty good. I do think I may be conflating the arcade machine with the lousy BBC version I also had. The latter was a real clunker of a game but I spent hours on it.

Speaking of BBC driving games, what was *Revs* all about? I remember it being a huge deal at the time but I never enjoyed it. It came in a big box and was an accurate reconstruction of the Silverstone track, I think? But it was impossible to drive. Like *Defender*, it took about three people to control it. Unlike *Defender*, it was boring and I don't think I ever completed a single track.

My fave driving game of all time is one of the *Burnout*s, although I can't remember which one. All I remember is it had a great online multiplayer mode where you had to crash and cause as much damage as possible. I had insane evenings playing that. Does that still exist? Answers on a postcard please my darlings!

As I said, I'm looking forward to the new *Forza Horizon 5*. On a selfish level, I just want a silly driving game where I can have a laugh. On a more spiritual level, maybe I can create a moment with my kids that will make them cry like absolute divvys when they're in their late-40s. *

> "My fave driving game of all time is one of the Burnouts, although I can't remember which one"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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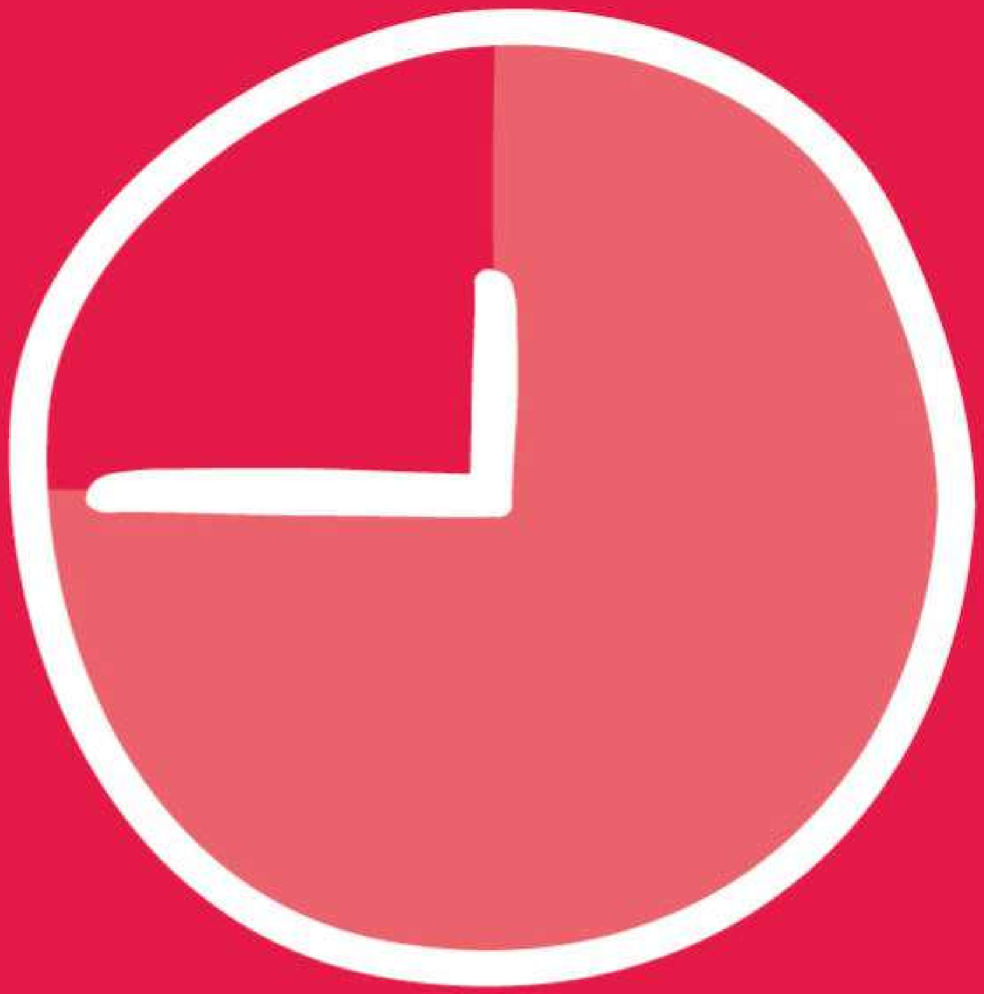

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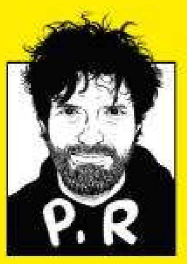
Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser.* These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Reality bytes



I've come to the conclusion that videogames and reality don't mix. It was while playing *Far Cry 6* recently that I had the revelation. The detail in that game, the visuals, the physics… they reach closer to reality than, say, 12-year-old me could ever have imagined was possible. We may not yet be at a point where games are indistinguishable from reality, but we're coming damn close.

And yet… at no point in *Far Cry 6* did I fail to be aware that it was a videogame. Somehow, despite how it looks, it feels so designed. Not that I was trying to suspend disbelief, but never did I lose myself in the experience. Never did I quite find myself living in that environment.

Which is weird when you consider that it happened to me all the time with the games I played as a kid. And I'm really old, so I was a kid literally decades ago. I can't even put it down to videogames being a relatively new idea back then, or the fact that I was so young. My imagination, I hope, has travelled with me into adulthood, and I'm rarely afraid to slip away into made-up worlds. There was just something so odd about so many of the games back then. Sometimes that oddness was writ large – the *Monty Mole*s or *Manic Miner*s – with bizarre worlds inhabited by bizarre creatures. Other times it was a sort of chilly otherness – *Sentinel* for example, or *Deus Ex Machina*. Sometimes the oddness was accidental, a kind of sparseness of detail that resulted from the limits of the technology. I'm thinking *Mercenary*, or *Midwinter*, or *Skool Daze*.

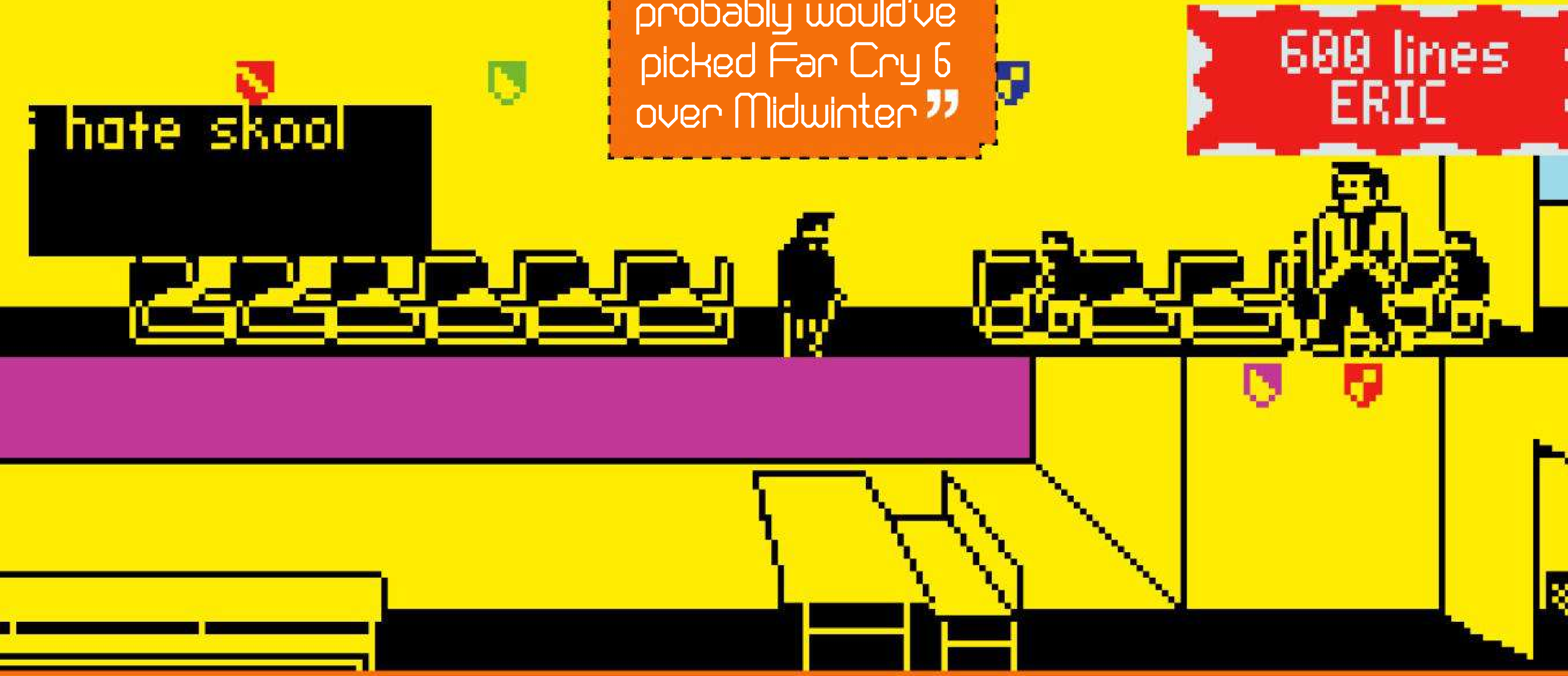
Whatever the case, to me most games felt like a portal to another dimension. You couldn't argue with the world they presented, because it was so far from the one we know. Oh, sure, *Skool Daze* might've tried to present a realistic depiction of British school life, but it was more like a surreal, acoustic, reworking of a full-on orchestral epic.

When modern games try to recreate reality, with all the lighting and particle effects available to today's developers, that uncanny valley effect comes into play. Somehow, I find the doubtlessly motion captured way in which NPCs run in *Far Cry 6* to be less realistic – or, at least, less believable – than the pip-pop-pip-pop scuttle of Eric in *Skool Daze*.

It's a cliché to say that less is more – and probably not accurate given that 12-year-old me probably would've picked *Far Cry 6* over *Midwinter*, given a choice – but I do wonder whether today's young gamers have lost something, by being handed so much almost-reality on a plate.

Do they really believe in what they're playing? Games were more than just games to me. They were experiences, portals to elsewhere, ripe with the possibility of adventure… a place where you could write swear words on a blackboard without the risk of it going on your permanent record. *

> "It's a cliché to say that less is more – and probably not accurate given that 12-year-old me probably would've picked Far Cry 6 over Midwinter"



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» Nicola and Anthony Caulfield have made several retro gaming-based documentaries, starting with *From Bedrooms To Billions*.

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Gracious Films

Nicola and Anthony Caulfield tell us about their brand-new Spectrum documentary

If you have watched the *From Bedrooms To Billions* series on the origins of computer games in the UK, you'll already be aware of Nicola and Anthony Caulfield's great work. They're now back with a new Kickstarter called *The Rubber Keyed Wonder: 40 Years Of The ZX Spectrum*, a documentary dedicated to the popular 8-bit computer. We spoke to them to find out more.

Why are you celebrating 40 years of the ZX Spectrum?

Anthony Caulfield: The release of the ZX Spectrum was a key moment for the computing and videogame industries. When it was released in 1982 it cost just £125, making it a viable purchasing option for most families across the country. The Spectrum's lower barrier of entry put computers in the hands of the masses, leading to an incredible wave of enthusiastic home coders writing and releasing their own games. After our last film *The PlayStation Revolution* came out we'd been working on a Commodore 64 film for some time, but had always planned to do something dedicated to the ZX Spectrum. When Sir Clive Sinclair passed away, we felt a compulsion to not let the 40th anniversary of the ZX Spectrum pass without us doing something.

Why isn't *The Rubber Keyed Wonder: 40 Years Of The ZX Spectrum* part of your *From Bedrooms To Billions* series?

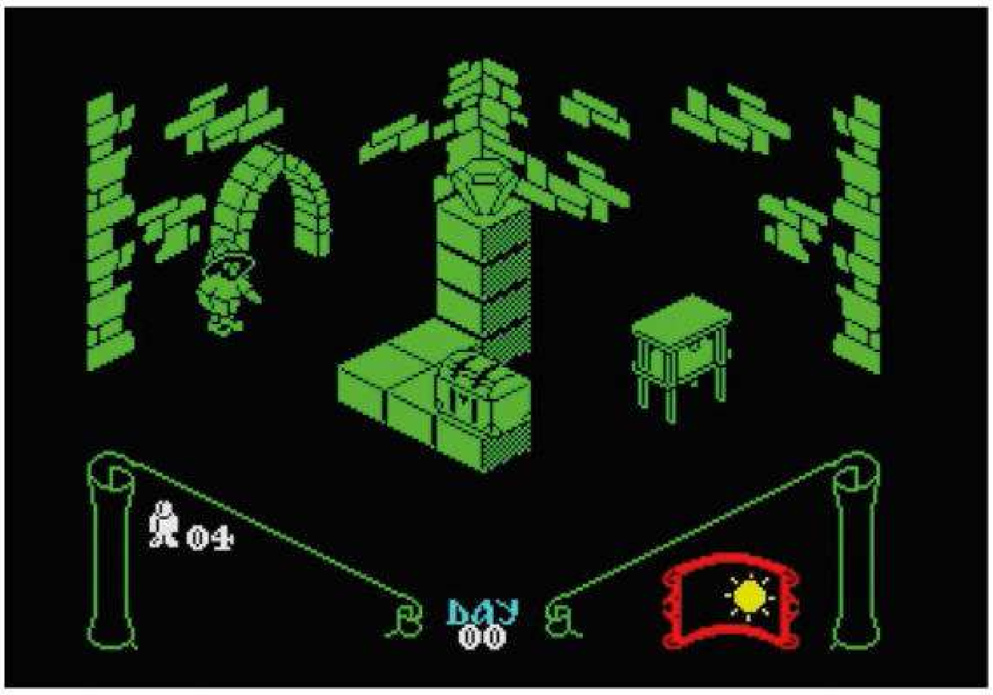
Nicola Caulfield: After finishing the *From Bedrooms To Billions* trilogy we wanted to do some self-contained films. The *From Bedrooms* films have a particular format that is very hard to do so we wanted to do some projects we could turn around faster that contain some different aspects to them, but still contain all the ingredients people seem to enjoy about the previous films such as insightful interviews and highly nostalgic archive footage.

How will this documentary differ from previous retro documentaries you've made?

AC: At 80 minutes this film will be shorter than our previous films so it can be watched in a single sitting and turned around by us a lot quicker, in less than a year. Our plan is also for this film to be voice-over driven to help us get to story beats that little bit quicker. Also, we are planning for some recreations to really help get across what it was like in a typical bedroom coder's environment back in the day, as well as one or two other new things we're trying so they should be a lot of fun but a little different at the same time.

Your first retro gaming documentary hit Indiegogo in 2013. What have you learned about crowdfunding since then?

NC: The key thing we've learnt over the years are the backer updates, as these are perhaps one of the most misunderstood aspects of crowdfunding. When a person backs a project on Kickstarter (or any other crowdfunding platform) they are not just preordering a copy of something that suddenly arrives in the post a year or so later, they are in fact joining a project and becoming part of something that must be made and they're along for the ride. The backer updates are where you can really share your progress, what you've discovered, or seen, or filmed and then show those backers in a way that is exciting and as always, we hope highly nostalgic. We've had so much positive feedback over the years about our updates that we look forward to doing them every time, as that is where people really understand the benefits of backing a project.



» [ZX Spectrum] If your retro documentary doesn't feature *Ultimate* games the Spectrum police will come after you.

The ZX Spectrum is a well-documented system, how do you intend to explore the machine's history in a new way?

AC: We can only ever really make anything as our own interpretation of the story, so we will track the ZX line up from ZX80, to ZX Spectrum and beyond to the modern ZX Spectrum Next. Also, we'll show people the world (pre-1977) before home computers were even available to better understand the significance of selling one in 1982 for just £125. In addition, the ZX Spectrum was exported and cloned all over the world (even Russia) selling millions of units worldwide so this is a crucial part of the story we need to investigate further and we'll be hearing from users in some of those countries!

"We want this film to feature fans, to hear from them on why the ZX Spectrum was so important and build as rounded a picture as possible," Anthony says.

Who are you hoping to interview and will it be brand-new footage?

NC: We hope to feature as many of the original Sinclair Engineering team as possible as well as interviewees from across the world helping us tell the clones aspect of the story. We also have a few legendary ZX Spectrum developers lined up that we haven't filmed before. In addition, we have accumulated over 365 hours of unseen footage across our three *From Bedrooms* films and this includes ZX Spectrum developers, so this project is a perfect place for us to use some of the never before seen material we have amassed over the years. Our Kickstarter raised enough for us to produce over 90 minutes of special features covering many aspects so there will be no shortage of amazing content!

Were you able to get any access to Sir Clive before he sadly passed?

AC: Sadly, no! However, it was his passing that made us decide we needed to do something, as there was a lot of media coverage surrounding his death with a lot of focus on the C5 electric car. Though the ZX Spectrum was covered by some news agencies, few seemed to really get across why the Spectrum was so great and the impact it truly had. Therefore, this film will be our attempt at doing that and Sir Clive will be present along with Rick Dickinson and one or two others through archive footage.

Will it be possible to support the documentary after the Kickstarter has finished?

NC: Absolutely, people can still join our project and be part of the backer updates. Just visit our Kickstarter project for *The Rubber Keyed Wonder: 40 Years Of The Sinclair ZX Spectrum*, click 'Late Backer' and join us that way!

Why do you think there's still so much love for the ZX Spectrum?

AC: Rock and roll was a huge deal for the baby boomer generation living through the Sixties, but the ZX Spectrum and all that came with it was the rock and roll for the microchip generation that lived through the Eighties. The ZX Spectrum touched many lives in many different ways, and this is why we also plan to feature Spectrum fans in order to understand that love as much as possible. ✱

***The Rubber Keyed Wonder: 40 Years Of The ZX Spectrum* is planned for a December 2022 release. You can back the project by visiting bit.ly/40spec**

» Look! It's the titular rubber keys from *The Rubber Keyed Wonder: 40 Years Of The ZX Spectrum.*

» Sir Clive Sinclair will appear in the documentary thanks to various pieces of archive footage.

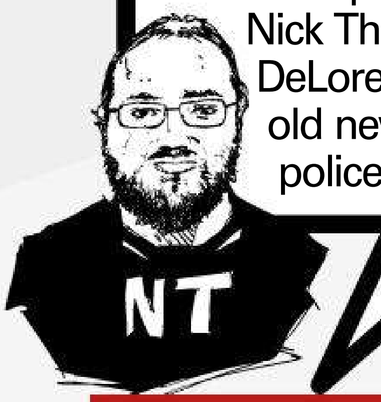
» The Caulfield's new documentary will look at various aspects of the Spectrum, including its many clones.

> " [We] had always planned to do something dedicated to the ZX Spectrum "
>
> **ANTHONY CAULFIELD**

» Anthony tells us that the Spectrum helped to "evolve the fledgling games industry into the largest entertainment industry in the world today".

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MARCH 2005 – Capcom has revolutionised Resident Evil, Gran Turismo 4 has finally arrived on the starting grid and Nintendo launches the DS in Europe and the UK. Nick Thorpe fires up the DeLorean to look at some old news, since the police box is occupied

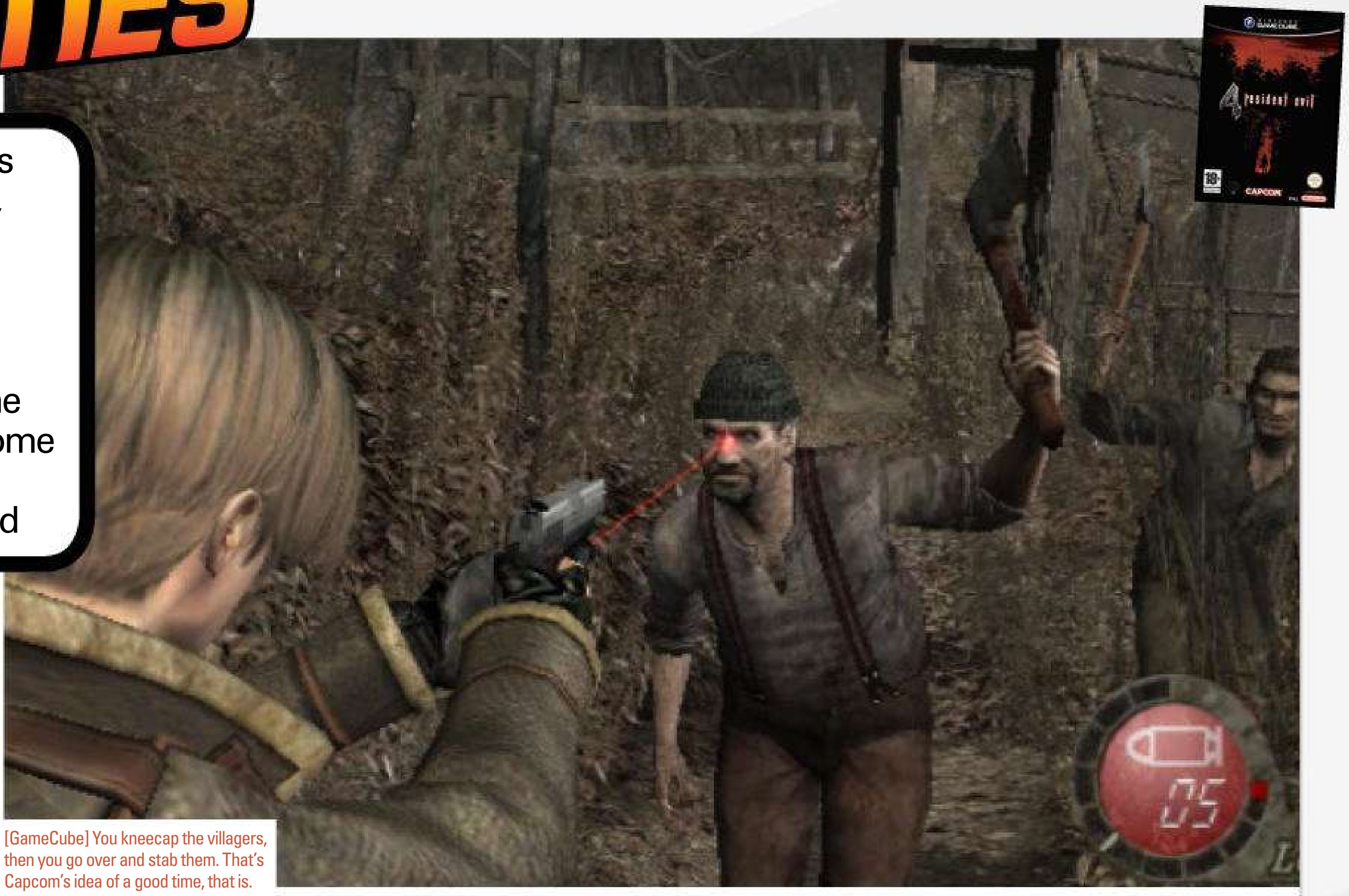


NEWS MARCH 2005

On 24 March, Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan following mass protests. In the previous month's disputed election, pro-government candidates won 65 of the 75 seats available, prompting claims of electoral fraud. Akayev was allowed to exile himself in Russia by Vladimir Putin, and resigned on 3 April. Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who had previously served as prime minister, won the presidency in July with 89% of the vote.

Doctor Who returned to BBC One on 26 March, starring Christopher Eccleston as the ninth incarnation of the Doctor, and former pop star Billie Piper as his companion, Rose Tyler. The series had originally been cancelled in 1989, with only a 1996 TV special co-produced with the American network Fox in the interim. The revived series was popular with both viewers and critics – it attracted an average viewership of 7.95 million per episode, and won two BAFTA awards.

Stand-up comedian Mitch Hedberg passed away on 29 March 2005 at the age of 37, from an overdose of cocaine and heroin. Hedberg was once hailed by *Time* magazine as "the next Seinfeld" and had received a development deal to create a sitcom for Fox. He sometimes referenced his drug use during shows, and had claimed in a *Penthouse* interview that his preferred way to die would be to overdose after becoming famous.



[GameCube] You kneecap the villagers, then you go over and stab them. That's Capcom's idea of a good time, that is.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 2005

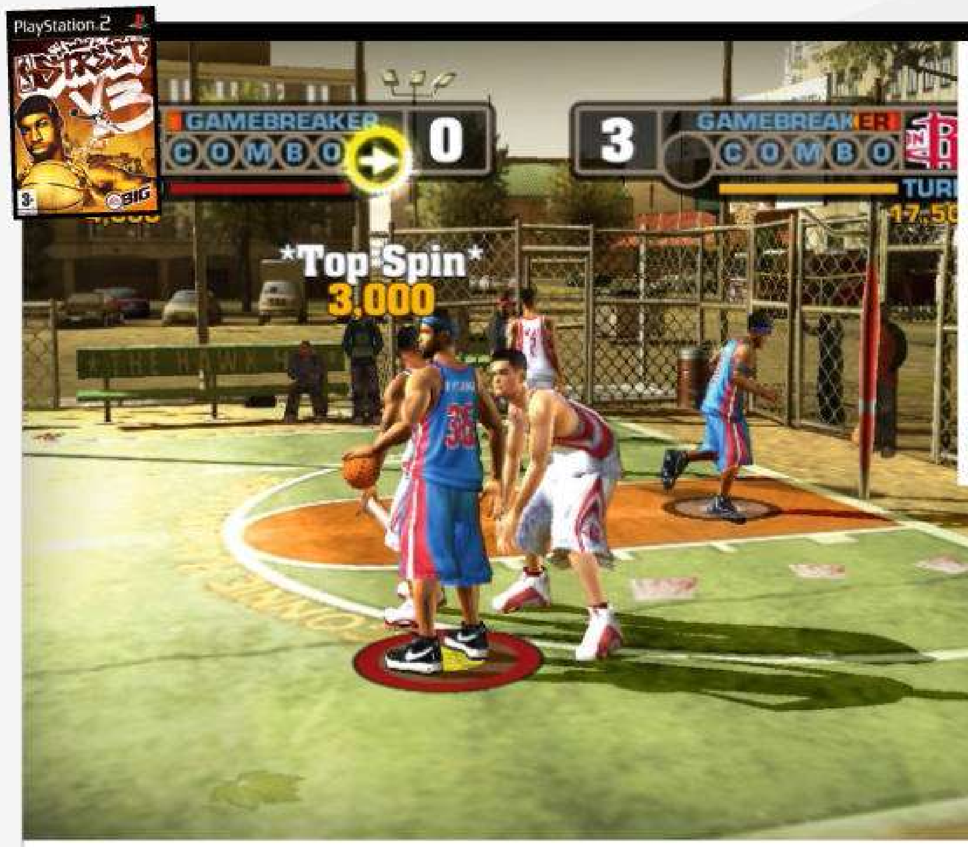
***Resident Evil 4* launched exclusively on the GameCube this month, and followed Leon S Kennedy's trip to Spain to rescue the president's daughter, Ashley Graham.** Capcom's new vision for the classic survival horror series earned unanimous praise, with scores of 9.8/10 from *Cube*, 97% from *NGC*, and 9/10 from both *games™* and *Edge*. The game's new focus on action was welcomed, with *Cube* saying "the satisfaction of mowing down onslaughts of evil minions is palpable", and *games™* noting the "well-implemented hit-location system". *NGC* was impressed with the pace of the game, telling readers "the days of traipsing down the same mansion corridors again and again" were over. *Edge* felt that "Capcom positively encourages your progress", thanks to the addition of checkpoints, but felt that the "dialogue is as whiffily cheesy as ever, and its storyline is shot through with holes". The game's graphical achievements were highlighted by *games™*, which declared it to be "one of the best looking titles of this generation". *Cube* concluded that it was "as close to a perfect game as you're likely to see".

After significant delays, PS2 owners were finally treated to *Gran Turismo 4*. Reviews praised its huge content offering, described by *Edge* as an "overwhelming pantheon of cars", as well as its attention to detail, which the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* claimed to be "more deranged than mere passion implies and counts as obsession". The racing was "hardly a jot better", according to *Official PS2*, which called the AI racers "frustratingly dunderheaded" – *Edge* also derided them as "bovine". Control was the divisive topic here. *Edge* felt that the game was "poorly served by the DualShock 2", with both steering and pedal control "desperately lacking in feel or precision", and scored the game 7/10. *Official PS2* felt that its handling "reached new heights of subtlety, feel and feedback", but conceded that with driving aids switched off, it was "right on the cusp of needing a wheel peripheral". That was still enough to earn the game 9/10.

If you were more inclined to race on the PC, *GTR* provided an excellent alternative to Sony's high profile game. *PC Gamer*'s 92% review stated that it had a "friendly, accessible driving model almost anybody could use", but that the simulation mode was "hardcore" and "around 13" on a difficulty scale

[PC] According to *PC Gamer*, *GTR* "can out-nerd Bill Gates' velcro wallet". No, we don't know what it means either.

[GameCube] We've seen some sort of a train level in this type of game before, we think.



[PS2] Oddly, Tim spent quite a bit of his review talking about Ryan King eating baked potatoes and Pom-Bear.

[Xbox] We're not betting types, but we reckon that guy getting shot definitely won't live long and prosper.

[PS2] Polyphony Digital brought the beauty once again, but apparently forgot to pick up the brains.

of one to ten. *Edge* scored it 8/10, noting "exquisitely polished" cars but less detail in the tracks, and claimed that the game "makes you want to be good at it" and was "the closest a simulator has come to entertainment". Also on PC, Introversion's god game *Darwinia* scored 7/10 in *Edge* and 90% in *PC Gamer*. The former felt that the "tactical simplicity" ultimately meant that the game became repetitive, while the latter contended that it was "a visual tour de force" and "a pure, faintly religious experience".

Fans of first-person shooters were well served on the Xbox this month – a port of *Doom 3* earned 8.5/10 from *Official Xbox Magazine*, and *Star Wars: Republic Commando* got 9.0/10. The licence was also released on PC, and scored 81% in *PC Gamer*, which noted that "the choice in the way you approach a situation is made for you, yet the style, story and spectacle remain". Xbox exclusive *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* mixed in some decent third-person combat and earned 9.2/10 from *OXM*, which stated the viewpoint "allows unprecedented freedom". Those wishing to avoid fun with guns were best served with *Dead Or Alive* Ultimate, an online fighting package that earned 7/10 from both *games™* and *Edge*, with the former stating that it was "as good as your broadband connection".

There was one more first-person shooter of note, the multiplatform sequel *Timesplitters: Future Perfect*. Free Radical's game earned 9/10 from *Official PS2*, 8.2/10 from *OXM* and 8/10 from *games™*, with *OXM* saying that it "does little new in the main single-player game", but that "extensive unlockable offline and Live options make it great value". The surprise multiplatform package of the month was EA's arcade-style basketball game *NBA Street V3*, which scored 9/10 in *Official PS2*, 90% in *NGC* and 8.0/10 from *OXM*. *Official PS2* claimed that "once you've played this, no other basketball game will do" – an assessment rejected by *Cube*, which complained that "the new Gamebreaker system is stupid and horrible", and that the game was "superfluous and expensive" in a 6.8/10 review.

Finally, the Nintendo DS became the first of the next generation handhelds to hit European shores, arriving on 11 March with a retail price of just £100 in the UK and €150 on the continent. The launch line-up of 15 games didn't include any major new releases, but *Super Mario 64 DS*, *Wario Ware Touched!*, *Polarium*, *Project Rub* and others ensured that there was plenty worth playing. 87,000 consoles were snapped up in the first weekend, comfortably beating the 69,000 GameCubes shifted in May 2002 to set a new record for UK launch sales.

That's it for this month – join us again next time when we'll see the return of Sam Fisher in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*. *

CHARTS

MARCH 2005

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
4 – Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (Ubisoft)
5 – Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Konami)

XBOX

1 – Halo 2 (Microsoft)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Konami)
4 – Fable (Microsoft)
5 – Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (Ubisoft)

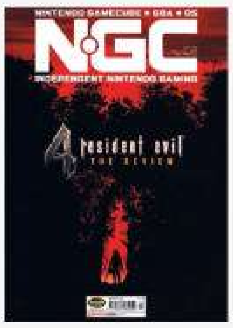
GAMECUBE

1 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
2 – Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Nintendo)
3 – The Incredibles (THQ)
4 – Donkey Konga (Nintendo)
5 – GoldenEye: Rogue Agent (EA)

MUSIC

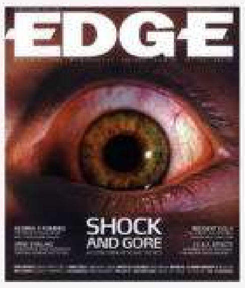
1 – All About You/You've Got A Friend (McFly)
2 – Good Luck Charm (Elvis Presley)
3 – Falling Stars (Sunset Strippers)
4 – Dakota (Stereophonics)
5 – Over And Over (Nelly ft. Tim McGraw)

THIS MONTH IN…



NGC

"Nintendo 21 will speak to you like HAL 9000, but in the cheery tones of Charles Martinet as Mario." What? EA games including "*Burnout 4*" are coming to GameCube in 2005 too. Eh? According to *NGC*, the huge *Resident Evil 4* review meant there was no room for a proper news section. Also, perhaps pertinently, "nothing much has happened".

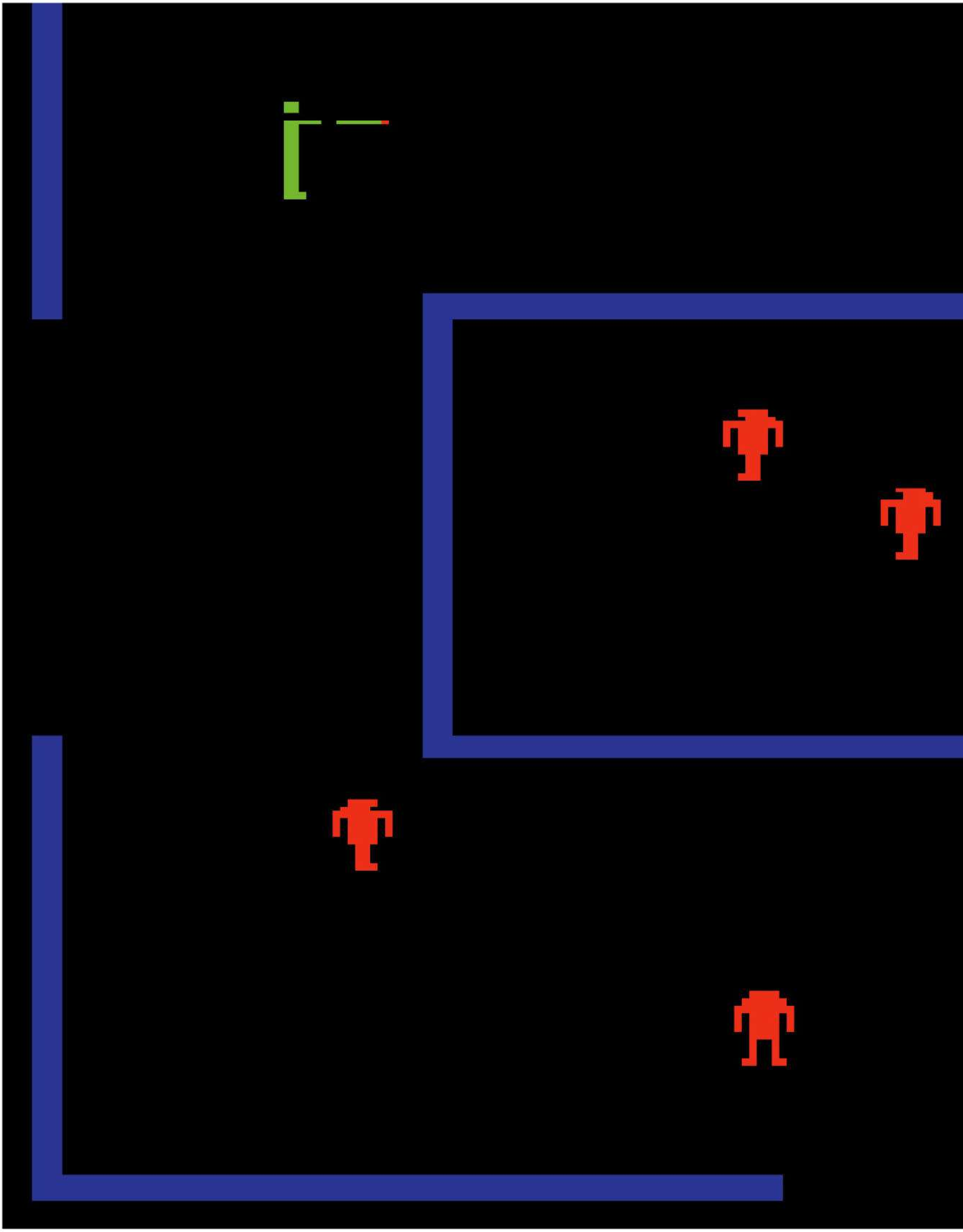


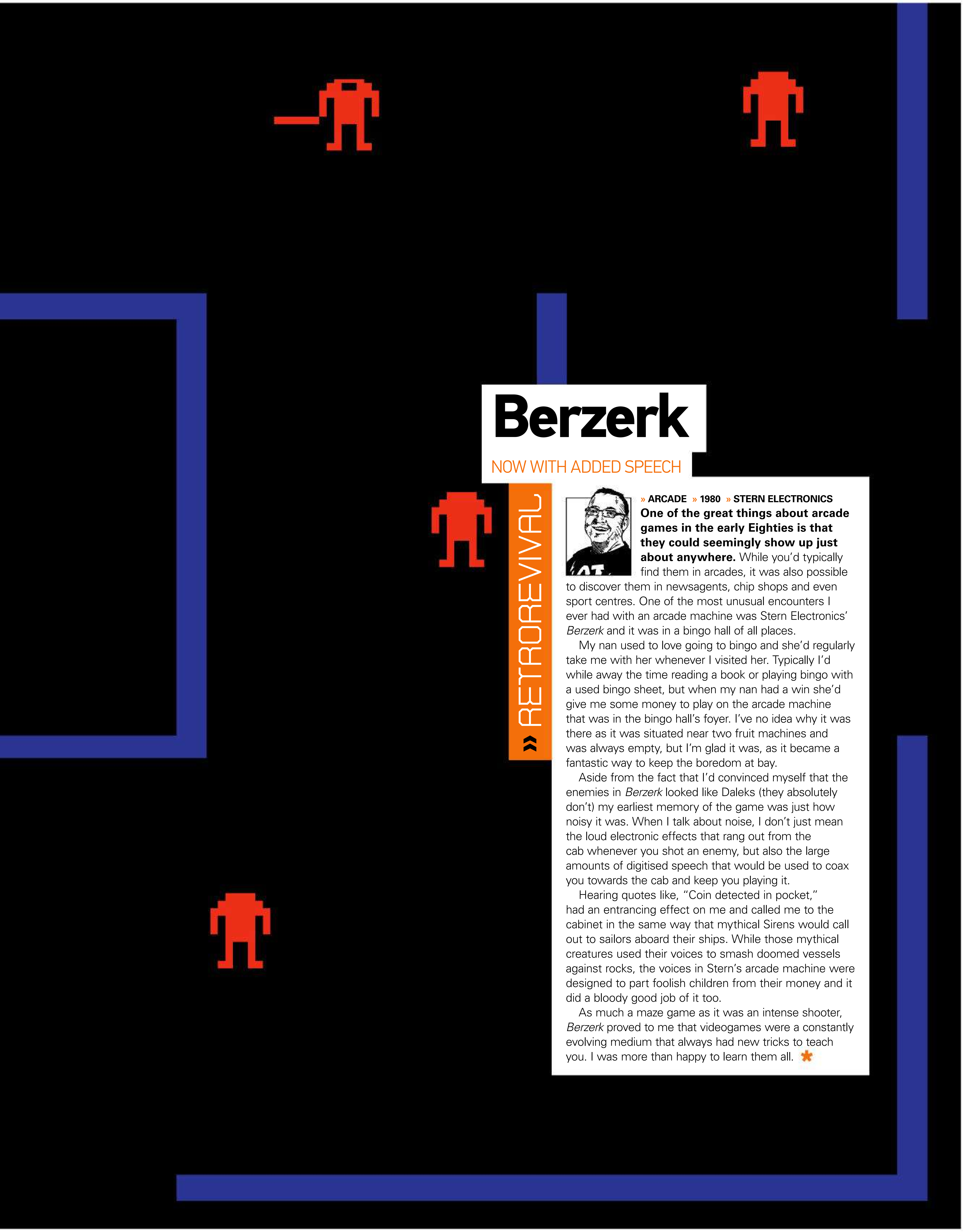
Edge

"I'm prejudiced in my thoughts on *Resident Evil* because I worked on it and I thought my script was better [laughs]." So says *Dawn Of The Dead* director George Romero, regarding the film adaptation of Capcom's hit game. "I have to say I didn't like it very much – I didn't think it did justice to the game. I thought it could have been a terrific movie."

Cube

What was our Tim's favourite game before *God Hand* came out? "It used to be *Final Fantasy VII* (or maybe *VIII*) but recently I've been drawn back into *Street Fighter* on the Xbox. *Third Strike* is my new fave game of all time." We kind of wish he'd concluded by highlighting the fact that none of these games were available on Nintendo consoles.





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» **ARCADE** » **1980** » **STERN ELECTRONICS**

One of the great things about arcade games in the early Eighties is that they could seemingly show up just about anywhere. While you'd typically find them in arcades, it was also possible to discover them in newsagents, chip shops and even sport centres. One of the most unusual encounters I ever had with an arcade machine was Stern Electronics' *Berzerk* and it was in a bingo hall of all places.

My nan used to love going to bingo and she'd regularly take me with her whenever I visited her. Typically I'd while away the time reading a book or playing bingo with a used bingo sheet, but when my nan had a win she'd give me some money to play on the arcade machine that was in the bingo hall's foyer. I've no idea why it was there as it was situated near two fruit machines and was always empty, but I'm glad it was, as it became a fantastic way to keep the boredom at bay.

Aside from the fact that I'd convinced myself that the enemies in *Berzerk* looked like Daleks (they absolutely don't) my earliest memory of the game was just how noisy it was. When I talk about noise, I don't just mean the loud electronic effects that rang out from the cab whenever you shot an enemy, but also the large amounts of digitised speech that would be used to coax you towards the cab and keep you playing it.

Hearing quotes like, "Coin detected in pocket," had an entrancing effect on me and called me to the cabinet in the same way that mythical Sirens would call out to sailors aboard their ships. While those mythical creatures used their voices to smash doomed vessels against rocks, the voices in Stern's arcade machine were designed to part foolish children from their money and it did a bloody good job of it too.

As much a maze game as it was an intense shooter, *Berzerk* proved to me that videogames were a constantly evolving medium that always had new tricks to teach you. I was more than happy to learn them all. *

THE EVOLUTION OF

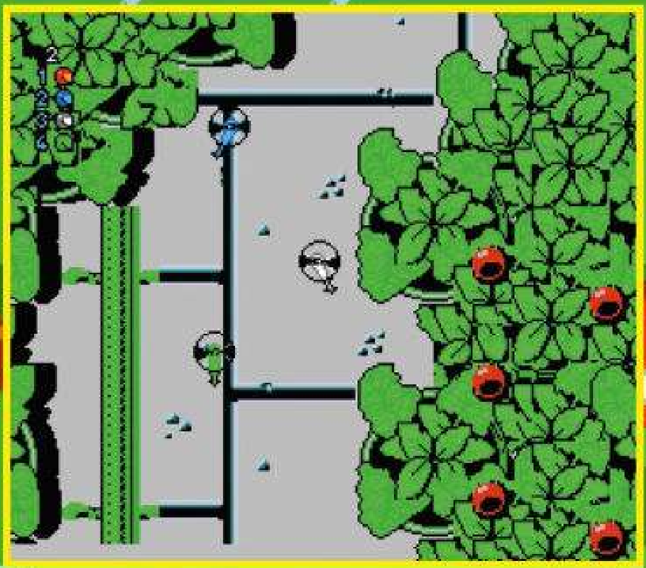
MicroMachines

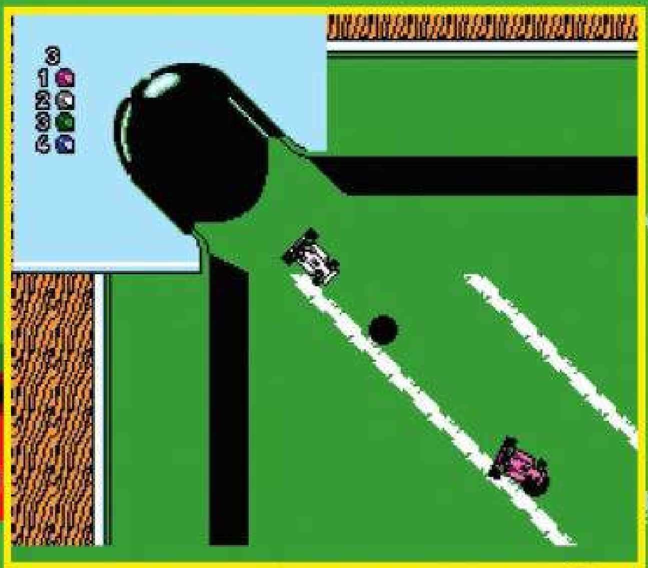
THE ORIGINAL SCALE MINIATURES

WHEN CODEMASTERS APPLIED ITS EXPERTISE IN TOP-DOWN RACERS TO A POPULAR TOY CAR LICENCE THE RESULT WAS A HIT CONSOLE TITLE. THE CREATORS OF MICRO MACHINES AND THE DEVELOPERS OF ITS MANY SEQUELS DISCUSS HOW THE LONG-RUNNING SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

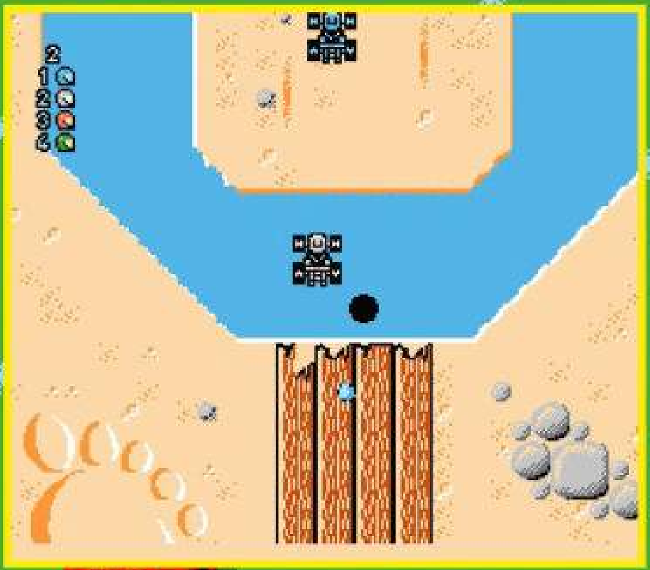
» [NES] The dense foliage in *Micro Machines'* greenhouse levels is effectively an obstacle course.





» [NES] The *Micro Machines* designers thought of its pool-table track in the pub while playing pool.

» [NES] *Micro Machines* was originally a dune buggy racer, which looked much like the NES classic's sandpit course.



MEET THE MICRO MACHINES MECHANICS

COLIN NICHOLLS

Colin Nicholls was a co-designer of the levels for the 2016 *Micro Machines*.

JOEL BEARDSHAW

The levels for the iOS/Android *Micro Machines* were co-designed by Joel Beardshaw.

MARK NEESAM

The background artwork for *Micro Machines 2* was created by artist Mark Neesam.

PAUL PERROTT

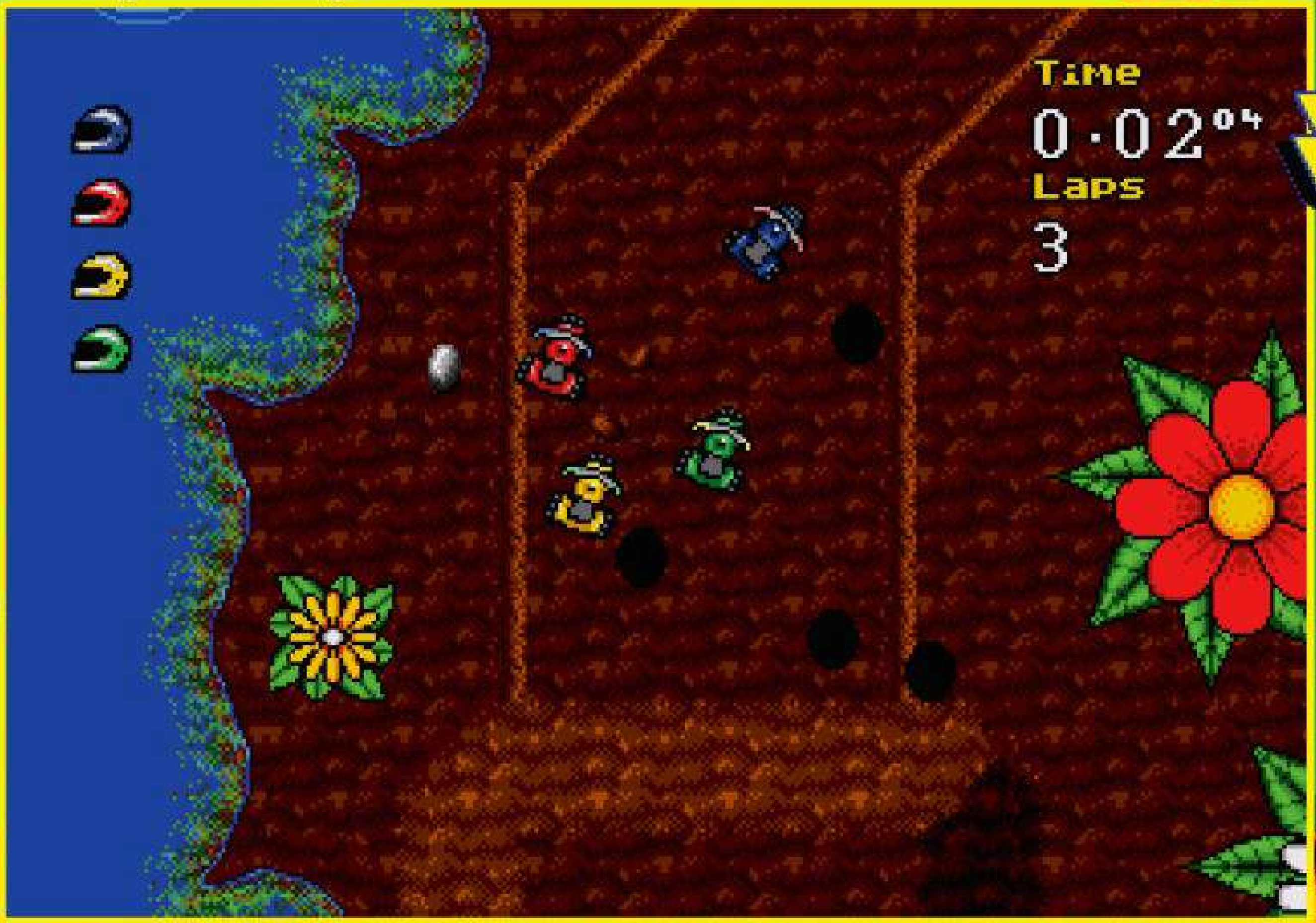
Artist Paul Perrott co-designed the original *Micro Machines* with coder Andrew Graham.

STEVE HOLLEY

Before *Micro Machines V3*, Steve Holley worked on the hardware side of earlier games.

TOBY EGLESFIELD

After the DOS *Micro Machines 2*, Toby Eglesfield became lead artist on *Micro Machines V3*.



» [Mega Drive] *Micro Machines 2* has numerous modes, like its Leagues mode, where you compete in a division.

In some ways it's ironic that *Micro Machines* was such an original game, as its gameplay largely refined concepts established by the top-down racing titles Codemasters had published in the mid to late-Eighties. In fact, much of its novelty came out of a tie-in with toy manufacturer Galoob, which the game started off without, as its artist Paul Perrott explains. "There were a number of titles being thought of for Galoob, and one of them was Andrew Graham's game," Paul says of his former co-designer's NES racer. "It was top-down, with these dune buggies bouncing around a course. This was my first graphics job, and when someone said, 'Do you want to do this?' I thought, 'Sure.'"

The two-man team got set up in a less than ideal workspace, which led to some early head-to-head play-testing with consequences for the loser. "We were working in a portakabin at the back of a farmhouse in the freezing winter," Paul grimaces. "We used to play the game, and whoever lost had to brace the weather, go to the farmhouse and bring back coffees! Andrew was tweaking the game engine, and I was coming up with graphics. Then the Micro Machines licence was pretty much just slotted into the gameplay he already had." Following a suggestion to depict the now licensed project's vehicles at toy-size, its developers sought inspiration for where to race them. "The level designs were just whatever we thought of down the pub – I literally suggested the pool-table level as we were playing pool there," Paul laughs. "The first level we came up with was the one with the school tables, and that was so much fun. It brought us back to when we were in school, and the design carried on from there."

> "THE LEVEL DESIGNS WERE JUST WHATEVER WE THOUGHT OF DOWN THE PUB – I LITERALLY SUGGESTED THE POOL-TABLE LEVEL AS WE WERE PLAYING POOL THERE!"
>
> **PAUL PERROTT**

As well as suitable racetrack locations, *Micro Machines* needed more vehicles than just dune buggies in order to reflect the wide range of toys that it had to be based on. "The dune buggies made it through to the sandpit level, but we also wanted race cars, which were more linear and had tighter cornering," Paul remembers. "They were put in the pool-table level, because of the long straights. Then the boats were obviously in the bathtub level, they had more of a skid effect, and the tanks were put in the garage."

This focus on representing a variety of different modes of transport wasn't entirely without risk, however, in that some were

▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: TOP-DOWN TURBOS

THE CLASSIC ORIGINALS THAT SET THE TONE

MICRO MACHINES

Building on the popular top-down racing games in Codemasters' *Simulator* series, *Micro Machines* extends the format with scrolling courses in place of single-screen tracks. It cleverly depicts its licence's cars at toy-size, and has you racing them around pool tables and school desks.

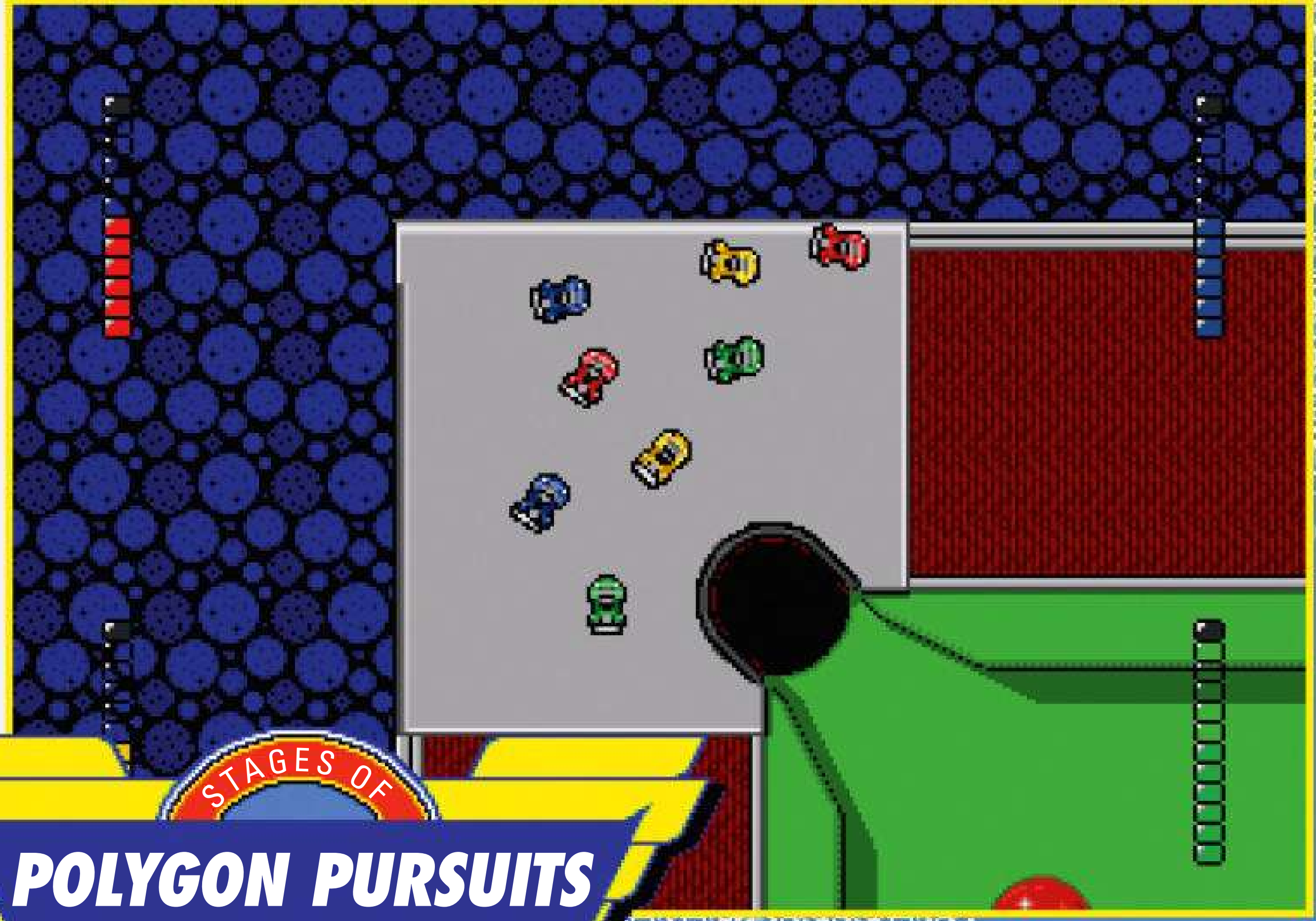
MICRO MACHINES 2: TURBO TOURNAMENT

Micro Machines 2 isn't just a prettier version of the original, it also introduces some fun new modes. As well as solo challenges against the clock, you can compete in a league, but the sequel's greatest addition to the series comes in the form of its chaotic eight-player Party mode.

MICRO MACHINES: MILITARY

Racing armed-vehicles was a component of *Micro Machines* from the first game onwards, but what its military-focused follow-up does is to make a game of this recurring feature. As well as races, *Micro Machines: Military* features single-screen shoot-outs and shoot-'em-up bonus rounds.

Micro Machines iOS images courtesy of Erik-André Mamen. / *Micro Machines 2* course maps courtesy of smspower.org's Maxim.



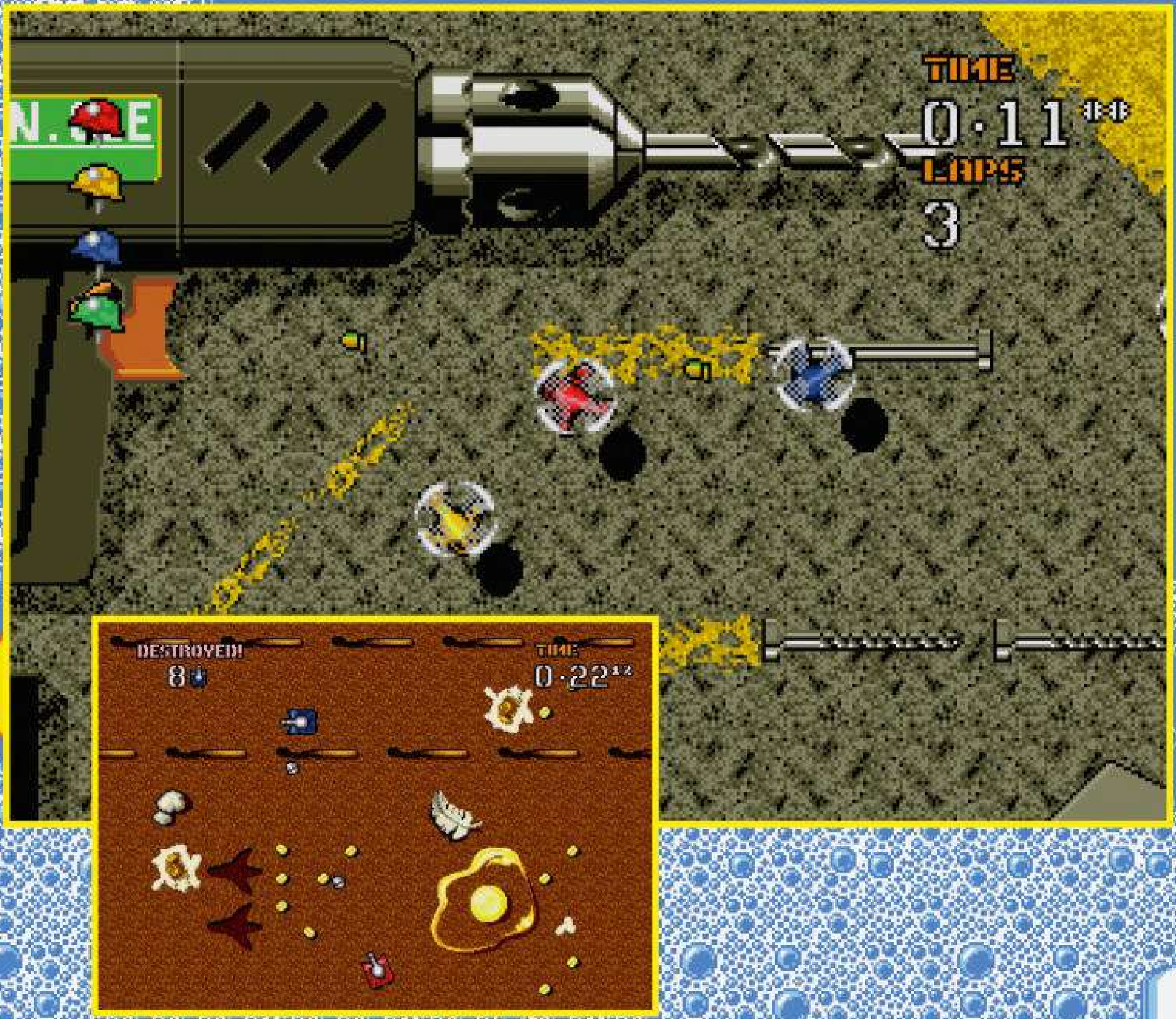
» [Mega Drive] If you don't mind sharing game pads there's an eight-player party mode in *Micro Machines 2*.

less fun to race than others. "I think one of the least successful levels was the one with the helicopters in the green house," Paul admits. "I was never a particular fan of that, just because of the collisions, I think. But again, it was another vehicle, and we got a *flying* vehicle. We also had ground vehicles and an aqua vehicle, so everything was pretty much covered."

Although already novel thanks to its eclectic tiny vehicles and its full-size home and garden locations, a colourful cast of drivers added to *Micro Machines*' originality. "I painted some watercolours of the characters, and got those approved," Paul notes. "I just tried to be as representative as possible so that anyone could relate to them. Plus they had to all be different, so you had the cool guy, the pretty girl and the slightly overweight chap."

Seen as a fresh take on the top-down racer, *Micro Machines* topped several charts. Its sequel was outsourced to two firms, with its visuals being entrusted to Mark Neesam. "I was an artist working on the level graphics

» [Mega Drive] A few well-placed shots can completely change a race in *Micro Machines: Military*.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION: POLYGON PURSUITS

KEY GAMES THAT TOOK THE SERIES INTO THE THIRD DIMENSION

MICRO MACHINES V3

Although 3D, *Micro Machines V3* shifts to a top-down perspective when practical. But more importantly, it successfully adapts the frantic chases that made its 2D predecessors so popular. Where *V3* innovates is with its over-the-top power-ups, which range from fireballs to huge mallets!

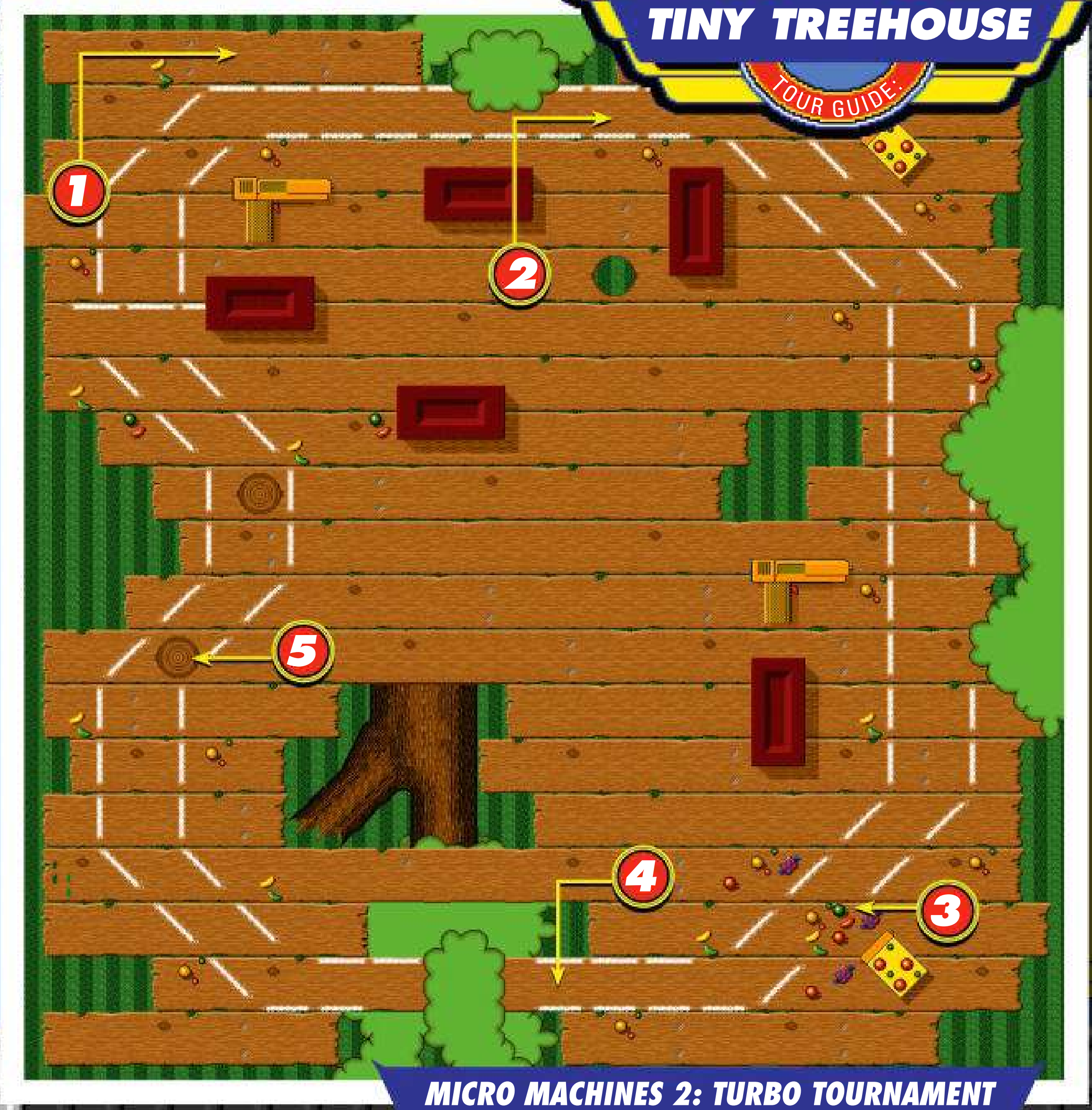
MICRO MANIACS

Where *Micro Machines* has you racing tiny vehicles, *Micro Maniacs* sees you racing odd little people. The licence-free spiritual sequel further differentiates itself with imaginative level designs, and with eclectic weapons, each of which is unique to one of its odd-looking characters.

MICRO MACHINES V4

Memorable for crazy locations including building sites and chicken coops, *Micro Machines V4* also stands out for its focus on power-ups. Before you win better models, you drive an outclassed car, so you have no choice but to fight for pick-ups such as weapons, health and speed boosts.

TOYCHEST TOUR GUIDE: TINY TREEHOUSE



MICRO MACHINES 2: TURBO TOURNAMENT

1 You're in danger of a nasty fall right from the off in Tiny Treehouse, so speed up accordingly, and try to drift gracefully around the precariously-sited first bend.

2 Keep in lane for the top straight – there's a gap to the left with a long drop down. Then skid around the brick, and accelerate along the track's only long straight.

3 Avoid driving over the sweets at the bottom-right of the course, if at all possible. Doing so at speed bumps you up in the air and off the side of the treehouse.

4 Make sure you're absolutely mid-lane for the short and very narrow straight after the sweets, and don't risk sharing it with another vehicle – it'll only end in tears!

5 Take care not to drive over the round knots in the wooden floor of the treehouse, or if you do then don't hang about as they can fall out and take you with them.

Time
0·00
Laps
3
STRUCK

» [Mega Drive] *Micro Machines: Turbo Tournament 96* was a PAL-exclusive update of *Micro Machines 2* that added new tracks and the PC version's level editor.

> "[MICRO MACHINES 2] KEPT THE BRILLIANT ORIGINAL CORE GAMEPLAY, AND THEN THREW THE KITCHEN SINK AT IT TO ADD VARIETY AND LONGEVITY"
>
> **MARK NEESAM**

outsourced to Big Red Software, which had close links with Supersonic through both having worked with Codemasters," Mark says of the arrangement. "I was responsible for all the background artwork: the surfaces the races took place on – tables, beaches, gardens etc, and all the obstacles and incidental details – like the food and crockery on the tables, and the plants and tools in the garden."

Since *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* was a 16-bit title rather than a NES one, Mark had scope to add additional locations, but he also adapted some of the original's. "A lot of the work involved taking existing assets from the first game and tweaking them a little if needed," Mark acknowledges. "Then I added new ideas for scenery to keep things fresh. I remember it being a lot of fun, with freedom to add whatever I liked providing it served a purpose and fit within the limitations of the system."

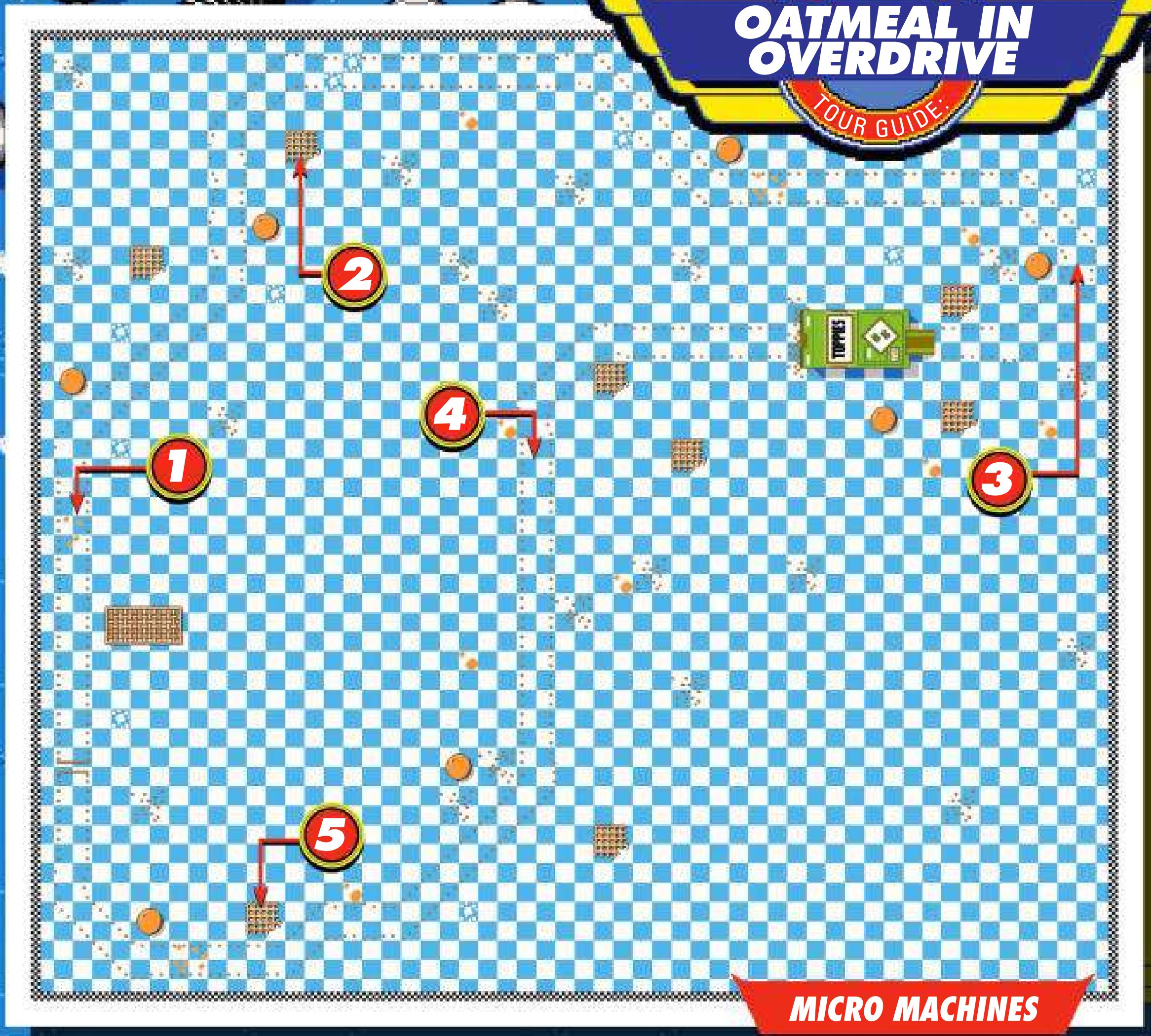
Although he worked on the sequel as an artist and had no contact with the game's designer, Mark's visuals may still have helped shape *Micro Machines 2*'s gameplay. "It's possible that my graphics inspired mechanics," Paul considers. "I drew artwork for the DIY levels with the power-drill bits, and then Supersonic made them move in and out to create a timed hazard. Similarly with the dining table, where a corn on the cob was used as a hazardous rotating bridge; I drew the original bridge and somebody else had the idea of spinning it."

While *Micro Machines* had been successful, its popularity was eclipsed by its sequel *Turbo Tournament*. Mark puts this down to it respecting and enhancing the original. "I think *Micro Machines 2* was so popular because it built so well on what had come before," Mark reasons. "It had all the things you would want from a sequel for that type of game – it kept the brilliant original core gameplay, and then threw the kitchen sink at it to add variety and longevity."

Behind the scenes, the *Micro Machines* series had been made possible by a team led by Steve Holley, which developed cartridge technology that allowed the games to run. "I was an electronics engineer, and I was hired to look into issues Codemasters was having with its American cartridges," Steve says. "They had been produced in Taiwan, and they weren't working very well. So we set up a factory in Leamington Spa, and we developed a product called a 'plug through,' which got around the NES's security system. That went on into the Mega Drive, when we produced *Micro Machines 2*, and then we developed the J-Cart."

J-Carts were cartridges with two joystick ports built in, and as well as *Micro Machines 2*, an enhanced version – *Turbo Tournament 96* – was also released on this format, as was its spin-off *Micro Machines: Military*. "As far as I know it was based on the Micro Machines range of military vehicles – and I'm not an expert on those at all!" Steve jokes. "I presume there was a specific range that was being launched by the toy guys. Obviously there was shooting if you played as the tanks in *Micro Machines*, so it was really based on that. We played it in the factory when it came out, and it was really funny ▶

TOYCHEST TOUR GUIDE: OATMEAL IN OVERDRIVE



1 Veer off course to the right to avoid the marmalade splat on the opening straight – it really slows you down, then get back in lane and slalom past the oranges.

2 Slow down and drift around the second waffle, otherwise you'll fly off the table! Get your speed up, skid around the right-hand bend, and dodge the marmalade.

3 Cut your speed right down for the hairpin, and drift right around it. Stay mid-lane and you'll be lined-up for a ramp that takes you over the cereal packet.

4 Skid around to the left, and then pick-up speed on the long downwards straight, then ease off on the gentle right-hand bend and the winding path that follows.

5 If you're at speed when you see the final waffle then it's vital that you hit the brakes. It's just above the table edge – a fall can cost you the race, and you don't want that.

▶ blasting the crap out of each other!" But despite its appeal, the military-themed *Micro Machines* was a one-off, which Steve feels was related to its lack of long-term playability. "It was a highly amusing game, but not one you played for very long," Steve observes. "It wasn't like the original, where it would draw you in and would keep you playing it for hours and hours. That was the difference, I think. But it was fun; we enjoyed it, and the eight-player games were hilarious. What we used to do was grab a cartridge off the production line every so often and have a play at it – as part of the quality assurance – that was a perk of the job if you like!"

While Steve was testing *Micro Machines: Military* carts, the original game's coder Andrew Graham was previewing the PlayStation, and thinking about the series going 3D. "I don't remember giving much consideration to a 2D version," Andrew recalls. "The thought of taking *Micro Machines* into 3D was just too much to resist. I had ideas about the cars jumping over ramps, falling to the floor and driving up the walls!"

As well as a new perspective, the PS1 sequel – *Micro Machines V3* – was given new features, such as collectibles that could be found off course as well as on the tracks. "We had shortcuts to surprise your friends in multiplayer games, so it was worth putting in remote power-ups to give players interesting paths to take," Andrew points out. "We designed the weapons to work well in multiplayer, where the idea was to give the people behind an advantage."

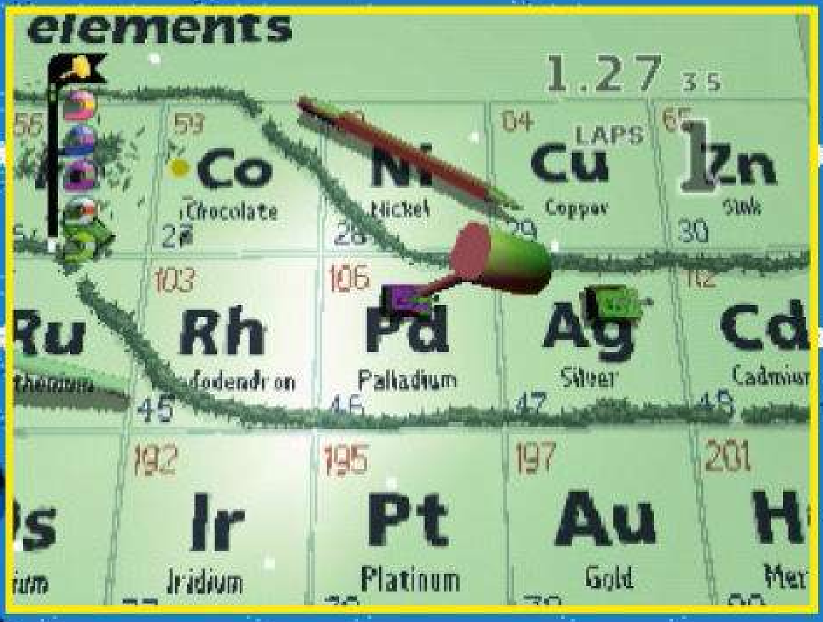
> "I DON'T REMEMBER GIVING MUCH CONSIDERATION TO A 2D VERSION. THE THOUGHT OF TAKING MICRO MACHINES INTO 3D WAS JUST TOO MUCH TO RESIST"
>
> **ANDREW GRAHAM**

There were also innovative objectives in *V3*, including the chance to win prize cars that could be saved to a memory card and raced against your friends. "We knew that kids built up big collections of the cars, so it seemed like a nice fit for a long-term goal," Andrew reflects. "It also gave an incentive to play through the single-player challenge, since that would give you a better selection of cars to play in the multiplayer game." Beyond its novel mechanics, *V3* represented a big step up from its predecessors in terms of its visuals, which required research by lead level designer Toby Eglesfield. "I think the garden environment was the first one," Toby reckons. "The reflection of the sky in the pond was us thinking what we could do with that. I remember getting a book out on garden plants, and learning about hostas and things like that."

Another stage took Toby back to his school days, which was probably unavoidable given that it was set in a classroom full of desks littered with text books. "Everyone was designing levels that had nostalgia and humour, and I remembered that kids at school joked about what they wanted to do for jobs," Toby muses. "They'd say something that was totally unlikely, so I gave the school books in *V3* titles like 'How To Be A Dolphin Trainer!'"

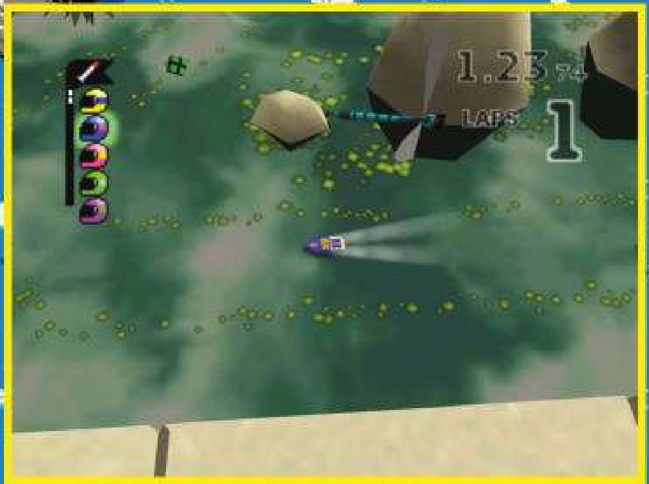
Further humour followed with the introduction of *V3*'s most memorable weapon – a great, big mallet that attached itself to vehicle roofs when a player picked it up. "The mallets crossed a boundary," Toby concedes, "but we knew they were going to be fun! We were trying to keep that thing from when

» [PlayStation] *Micro Machines V3* brings the series into the polygon era while retaining the original's gameplay.

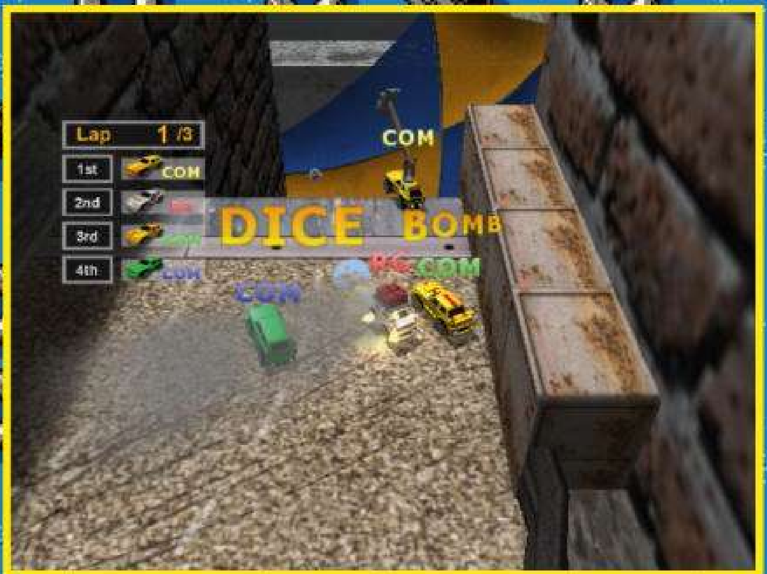


» [PlayStation] Silly weapons are *Micro Machines V3*'s gift to the series – just look at that mallet!

» [PlayStation] A spiritual successor rather than a true sequel, *Micro Maniacs* is clearly of the same lineage.



» [N64] *Micro Machines 64 Turbo* was a neat update of *V3* that let eight players play using four N64 pads and came boxed with a free Micro Machines toy.



» [PS2] Rather than a fun extra, you absolutely need the power-ups in *Micro Machines V4* to win the early races.

you were growing up and silly things would happen. It was what kids would imagine if they were playing with toy cars."

Providing oversight on *Micro Machines V3* was Steve Holley, who had been working in-house since it had become clear that the need for cartridge production had passed. "When the PlayStation was announced I moved into the main company, where I started as a producer," Steve recollects. "Once *Micro Machines V3* entered the alpha or beta stage I saw it through testing, where we would make comments if the levels weren't very good or didn't work. This was the first PlayStation title that Codemasters had made, so there was a hell of a lot of emphasis on it being right when it went out."

On release, *Micro Machines V3* garnered critical acclaim, but its follow-up ditched the licence in favour of on-foot racers, after a realisation by its designer Andrew Graham. "We were aware that the series had built its own popularity, and wasn't dependant on its association with the toy cars," Andrew notes. "So when it came to *Micro Maniacs* we made the decision to break the link altogether. I still cringe to think of the software the *V3* level designers used. I had to write it myself, and it wasn't up to modern standards, to say the least! So for *Micro Maniacs* we employed a dedicated tool programmer who developed an excellent Windows-based editor that was in another league."

Another coder on the project was Andy Severn, who remembers the unique-to-each-character weapons in *Micro Maniacs* being a product of using specialists. "The team started with just three of us," Andy says of the development process. "It was Scott Evans and myself in a tiny basement room as programmers, working with Andrew Graham as the lead designer. As the team grew I took on the role of lead programmer, and I developed the PS1 graphics engine. The amazing weapons systems were coded by a small subgroup dedicated to making those look and feel just right. In those early days of 'joined-up games production' having specialist groups really seemed to work out for us."

Having been the producer on *Micro Machines V3*, Steve Holley followed the progress of its follow-up, and felt that ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: FUTURE CLASSICS

THE TITLES THAT BROUGHT MICRO MACHINES UP-TO-DATE

MICRO MACHINES (IOS)

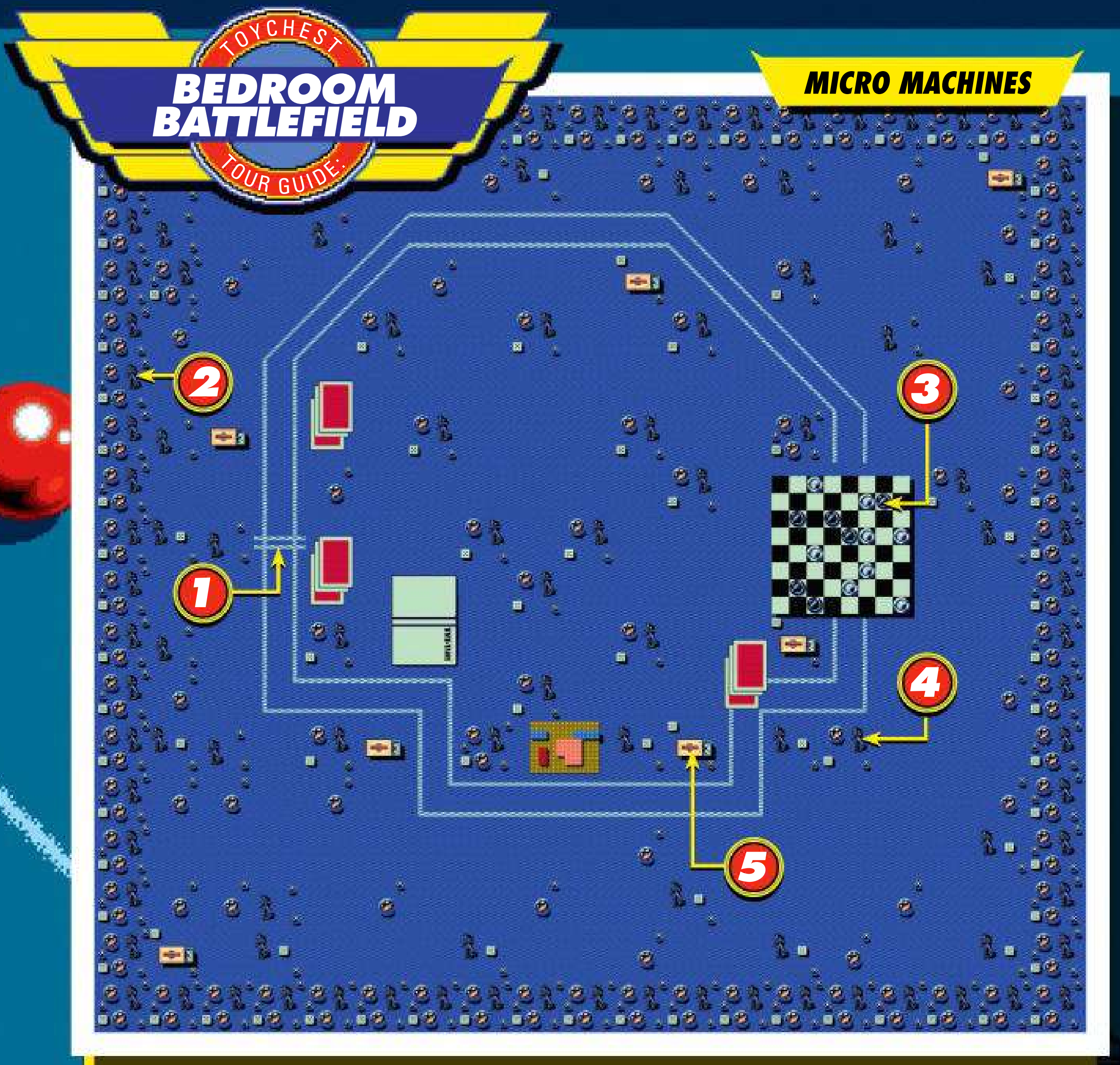
Heavily influenced by Codemasters' previous title *Toybox Turbos*, the iOS/Android *Micro Machines* has more courses and exploits its Hasbro-owned licence by including a Hungry Hungry Hippos level! Unlike other titles in the series, you don't have an accelerator or brakes to worry about.

MICRO MACHINES: VR RACING

As a concession to motion sickness, *VR Racing* restricts itself to gently panning in and out and from left to right. In terms of innovations, there's an Escape mode – where you race a deadly line that chases you, and an Overtake mode – where you get quotas of slow drivers to pass.

MICRO MACHINES: WORLD SERIES

As well as welcoming back Hasbro's hippos, *World Series* further leverages its licensing by having Nerf guns for weapons! Besides high-speed races around domestic settings, it has a six-vs-six Battle mode, with challenges such as Capture The Flag, King Of The Hill and Bomb Delivery.



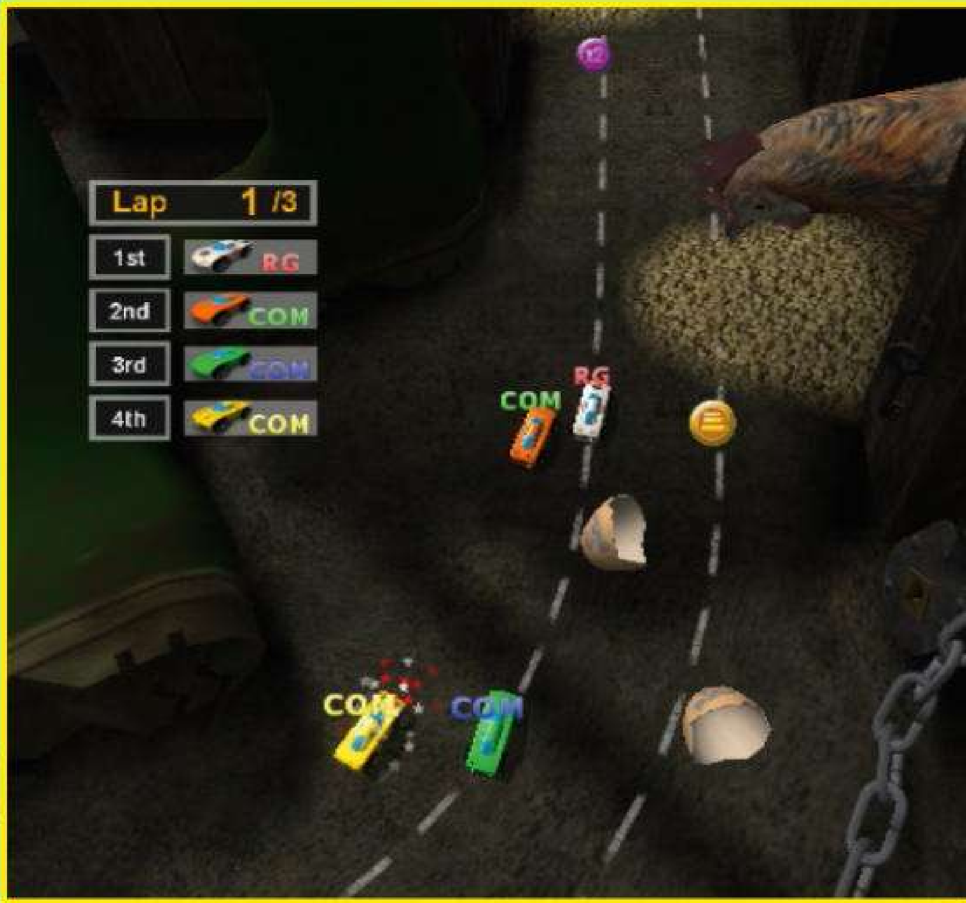
1 Treat the starting line as a battlefield, and blow away as many of your rivals as possible. If you end up in front swerve left and right to avoid return fire or you might lose the lead.

2 The obstructive toy soldiers scattered around Bedroom Battlefield's upper straights help the course live up to its name, so make sure that you don't go too far off course.

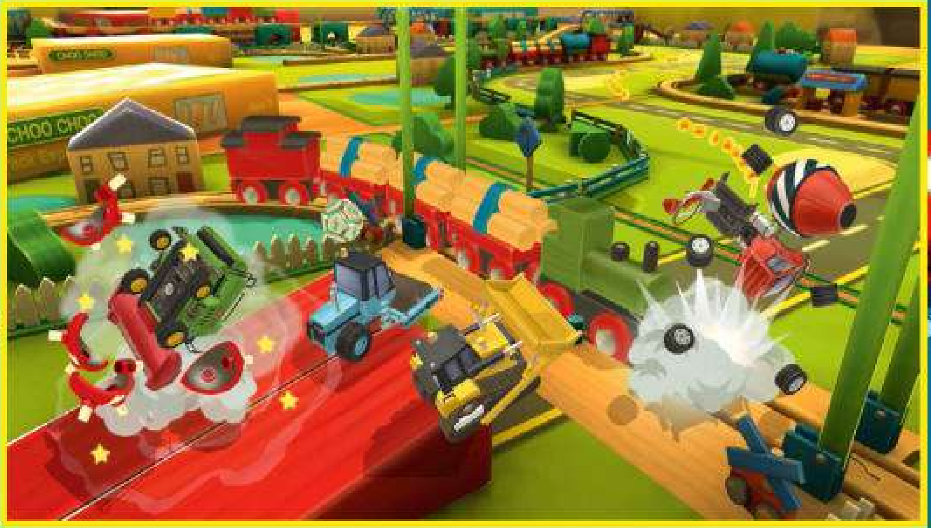
3 The chessboard can be a seriously awkward obstacle, but you can drive between it and the dice on its right, and then back onto it just above its bottom-right square.

4 You need to slow down for the right-angled bend in order to not crash into the toys beyond, then you speed up for the straight and take out any opponents in front.

5 Look out for the matchbox that marks another right-angle bend in the road, and keep your speed under control for the next one just after the short straight.



» [PS2] Unlikely locations such as chicken coops are par for the course in *Micro Machines V4*.



» [PC] *Toybox Turbos* was *Micro Machines* without the licence, and influenced the iOS *Micro Machines* title.

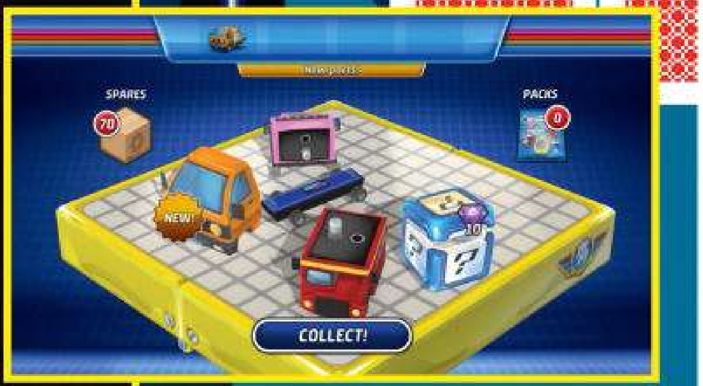
▶ *Micro Maniacs* fell short of its licensed predecessors. "*Micro Maniacs* was racing little people instead of cars," Steve reviews. "It was to get away from the licensing, but it just didn't work. It wasn't anywhere near as successful as the *Micro Machines* titles. I think the joy of *Micro Machines* was the relationship you had with the characters. We were always arguing about who was going to play as who. We'd be saying, 'I don't want to be bloody Dwayne!' and as soon as you lost that a lot of the appeal of the earlier games disappeared."

Although well-reviewed, *Micro Maniacs* was followed by a licensed *Micro Machines* title, although *V4* didn't entirely appeal to the designers of the next game in the series. "It was interesting going back to *Micro Machines V4*, because it was quite brutal," Colin Nicholls contemplates. "Level design had moved on, and what we found was that you had levels with right-angled corners that gave you no forewarning before they came up. So that became a main consideration on *Micro Machines* iOS, that we would be a lot more forgiving on the corners, and give players a lot more warning. I think we did balancing on the speed of the cars as well, so that they could react to any obstacles."

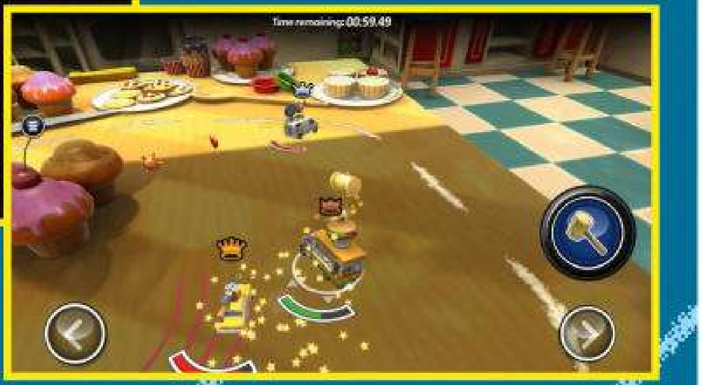
Fellow level designer Joel Beardshaw has memories of reviewing not just *V4*, but the entire line of *Micro Machines* games, with a view to bringing back their best locations. "I was more of a Nintendo kid when I was growing up, so *V4* – and *V3* even – were kind of new games to me when I started working on the iOS game," Joel concedes. "I remember looking for the types of environments that people really loved across the whole *Micro Machines* series. Because we were excited to be making a *Micro Machines* follow-up, and so we wanted to look back at the things that we were nostalgic for, and also make sure we were hitting the notes that people expected."

Prior to *Micro Machines* iOS, both Joel and Colin had worked on *Toybox Turbos* for Codemasters, which was accurately reviewed as *Micro Machines* without the licence. "*Toybox Turbos* was an Xbox Live/PSN game with generic *Micro Machines* type cars," Colin explains. "All the stuff around them was very generic as well – like we had wooden trains. So that was a really fun game to do, and that kind of laid the groundwork for the iOS *Micro Machines*, just with tweaks where we converted the controls for touchscreen."

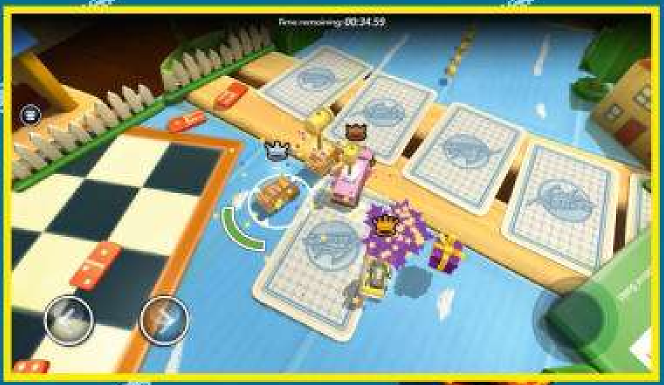
More specifically, *Micro Machines* for iOS lacked an accelerator and brakes, a decision that was made for good reasons, as Joel makes clear. "That was mainly down to the touchscreen, and how much we could fit on it – especially with smaller devices. The problem was that we had left and right on the left-hand side, and if we had accelerate and brake on the right-hand side you would have had to take your thumb off of one of the two in order to use a power-up – neither of which was good!"



» [iOS] Building new vehicles by earning parts is a fun new aspect of the 2016 *Micro Machines*.

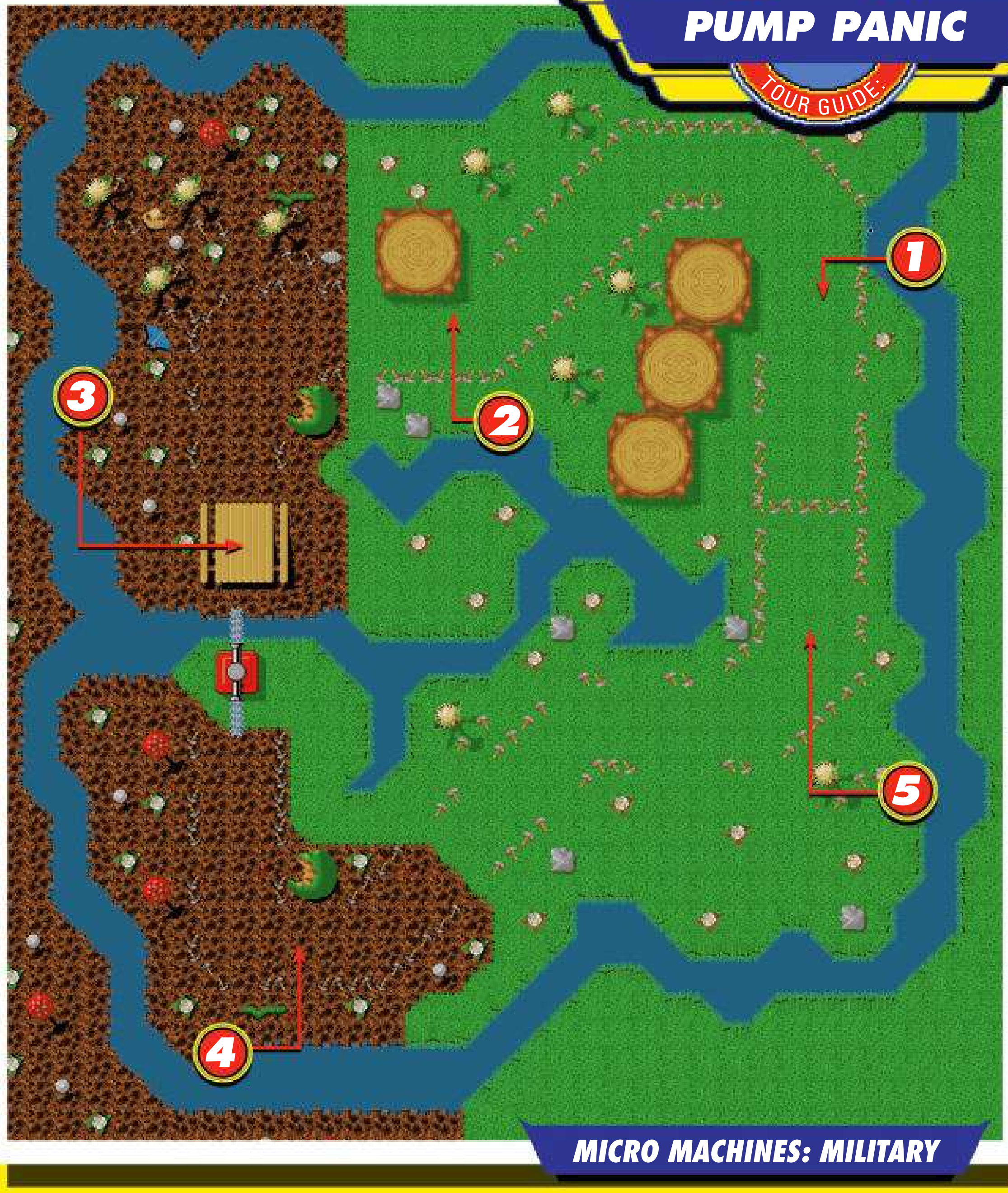


» [iOS] Cornering is easier in *Micro Machines*, as its vehicles don't have brakes or accelerators.



TOYCHEST TOUR GUIDE

PUMP PANIC



MICRO MACHINES: MILITARY

1 Speed along the opening straight, and then drift left around the row of tree stumps. Get off a few rounds at the other racers, as they'll be doing the same to you.

2 Keep the drift around the first few tree stumps going, and then rotate the back end of your car 180-degrees to the left in order to skid past the lone tree stump.

3 Approach the lollypop stick ramp at speed, or you'll fall short of dry land. Make sure your jump takes you directly over the water pump, otherwise you will get penalised.

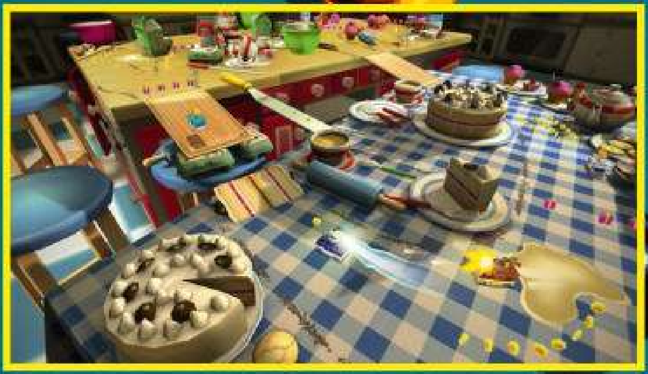
4 Skid around the hairpin, but keep to the lines marked on the course. Otherwise you risk ending up in the water that surrounds the right-hand side of this section of track.

5 Pick up the pace along the final straight. But keep in mind that this is a good stretch to shoot rivals into a spin, or for them to blast your vehicle out of control.

Further concessions were made to the iOS *Micro Machines*' host hardware, insomuch as it was made possible to fit runs around its courses into spare moments. "It was really about making it accessible," Colin notes. "The races were meant to be super-quick, where you could run around a track in maybe 30 seconds. It wasn't to mean we couldn't put right angles or hairpin bends in, but we had to be forgiving. So we put lots of run-off space in so that you wouldn't fall off a table, and ensured that we didn't have any dead ends or snags."

In addition to the different approach to its levels, the relationship between the weapons and vehicles in the iOS *Micro Machines* was looked into, in order to better theme them. "Each of the vehicles in iOS had a couple of weapons that were different for them," Joel remembers. "So if it was a fire truck then when you got the machine gun pick-up you got a water cannon that would push people away rather than damaging them, and if you had a snowplough then instead of dropping bombs you would drop ice bombs."

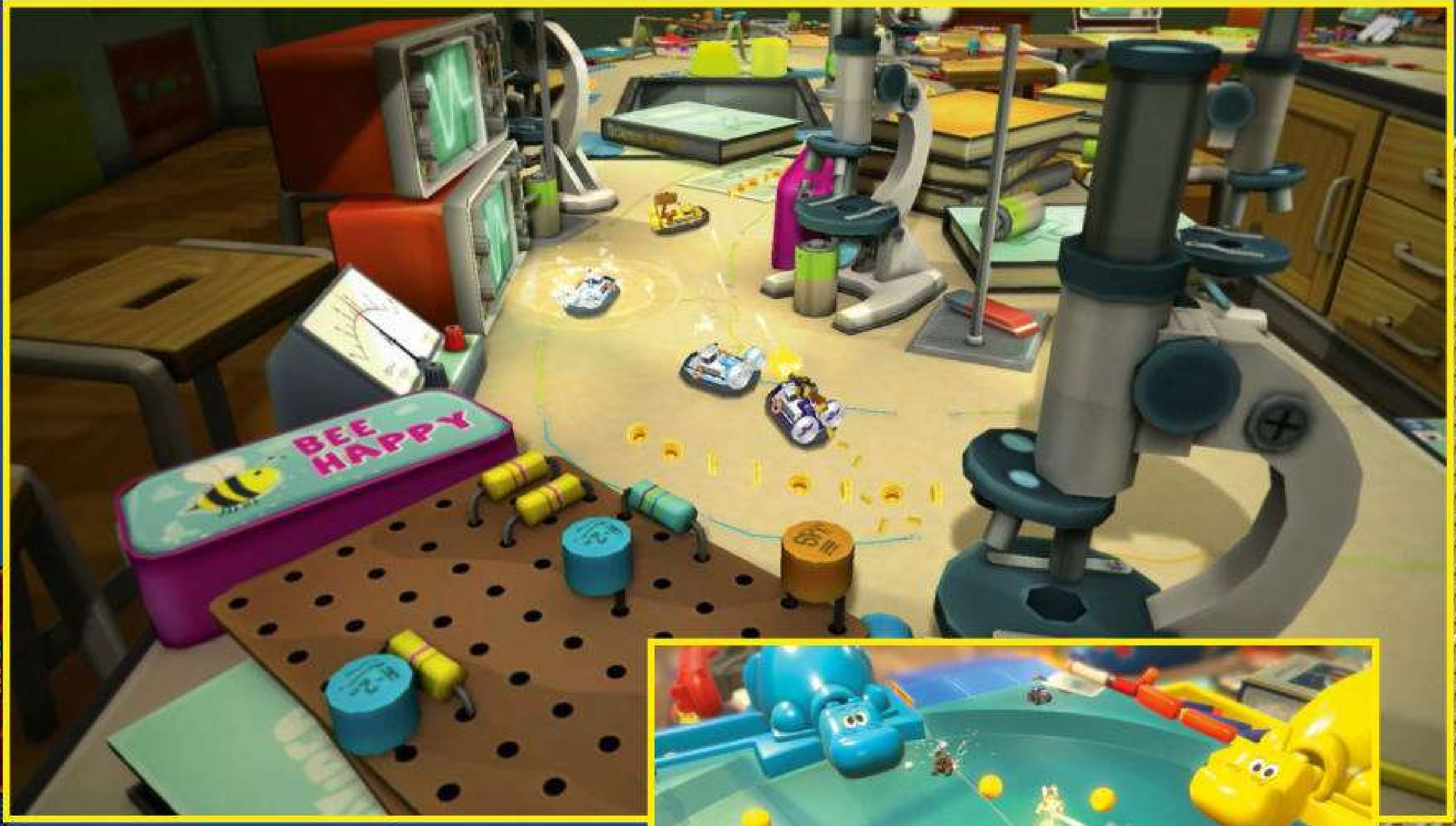
Since most of the game's weapons inflicted damage, the idea of racing toy cars was taken a step further, in that vehicles broke into pieces if they took too many hits. "We turned all of the bits of damaged cars into physics objects," Joel explains, "and making them fall apart was just a fun, satisfying way of making them feel like toys. So it was trying to remind players that these weren't real cars."



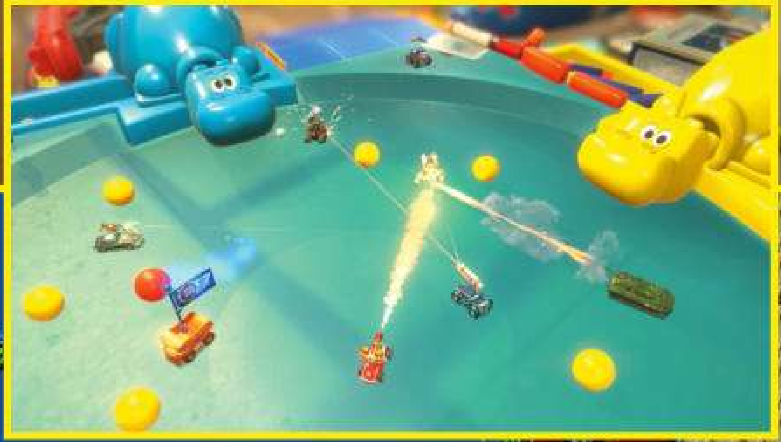
» [Android] As well as looking nice, *Micro Machines: VR Racing* is designed to not make you sick!

"I REMEMBER LOOKING FOR ENVIRONMENTS THAT PEOPLE LOVED ACROSS THE MICRO MACHINES SERIES. BECAUSE WE WERE EXCITED TO BE MAKING A FOLLOW-UP"

JOEL BEARDSHAW



» [Android] Familiar environments such as the science lab return in *Micro Machines: VR Racing*.



» [PC] As well as Micro Machines, *World Series* makes good use of some other Hasbro toys.

A fortunate opportunity came out of the Micro Machines licence having been taken over by the toy giant Hasbro, which the iOS game's designers took full advantage of. "I remember everyone was really excited, especially about Hungry Hungry Hippos!" Joel grins. "We were happy to get that into the game. Then some people in the team were big fans of GI Joe, so there were lots of GI Joe vehicles around too. There were the Nerf guns as well; the weaponry was skinned around Nerf weapons, which kind of fit that toy-like feel."

As work on the iOS title drew to a close, a subgroup of its team split off to make *Micro Machines: VR Racing*. Colin didn't work on it, but he remembers its origins. "*VR Racing* would have been an opportunity to make a game for the Gear VR store," Colin points out. "So I think there might have been a deal done with Samsung, where *VR Racing* was a bit of a quick offshoot of iOS to try to get that all up and running."

As with all VR projects, a key objective of *VR Racing* was to avoid making its players feel ill, which was achieved by gently moving the camera while avoiding rotating it. "Its top-down table view was the easiest on the eyes and mind," Colin confirms. "It also accentuated that the vehicles were toys, as it gave them that scale. So that worked quite nicely with the smooth motion as you went around the tracks looking down at the table-tops."

The VR title's boss races closely resembled those in *Toybox Turbos*, which gave Colin a special insight into how the one-on-one races were being made in VR. "That was structured so that you would go to an environment – like a toy room – and do a series of races," Colin reviews. "Then before you progressed to the next environment you'd face-off with a boss. There wasn't an extra layer of content on the boss tracks; the challenge was purely on boss AI." Of the modes in *VR Racing*, its Escape challenge stood out for its originality, in that it tasked you to keep ahead of a deadly line that approached you from behind at speed. "The Escape mode was a challenge that went through a few iterations," Colin reveals. "We finally settled on a 'cloud' that followed the player around. It was kind of cool, and it worked pretty well."

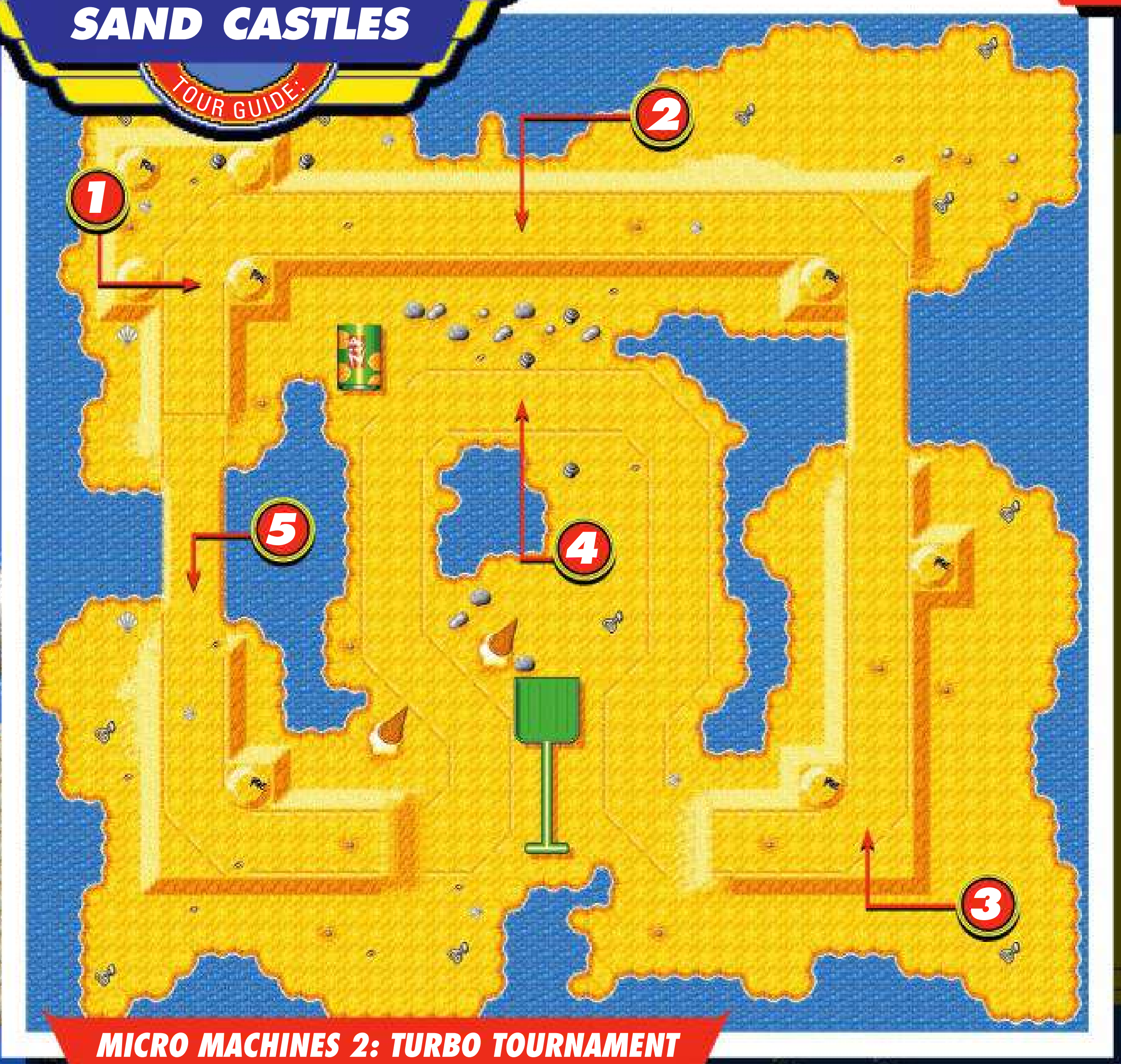
On the back of positive reviews of iOS and *VR Racing*, work was started the following year on a combat-focused follow-up, which Colin was again on level-design duty for. "When we released the iOS game we did lots of focus testing in obscure territories, like Australasia and Singapore," Colin recalls. "That was so it didn't get a lot of visibility, but still got tested in a live environment. It had little battle mode arenas in it, and I think there was a lot of data that came back that people were playing them a fair bit. So we wanted to put a focus on battle arenas in *World Series*."

The key to the latest *Micro Machines* title's battle arenas lay in the different team-based online-multiplayer challenges that its developers could set within them. "The cool thing was finding game modes that were fun to play," Colin enthuses, "and finding out how the power-ups would work with them, and it was very straightforward to go into the traditional games of Capture The Flag and King Of The Hill. It was also an interesting challenge working out how to get the cars to work well in a battle-arena environment. It wasn't first-person, so you couldn't twitch and shoot behind you, so all the guns were auto-aim."

Micro Machines: World Series also had local multiplayer modes, including smaller battle arenas, which fit with the overall theme of vehicular combat in the game. "We always wanted *Micro Machines* to be that couch-play social game that you played when you got back from the pub," Colin beams. "I think with iOS *Micro Machines* we had small arenas with four player matches, which we then retained for the *World Series* local play. They were just on one screen, and the camera would zoom out when the players dispersed and zoomed back in if the gameplay got exciting."

Reviewers deemed *World Series* a worthy addition to the *Micro Machines* series, and like the original game it topped the UK charts. The

TOYCHEST TOUR GUIDE: SAND CASTLES



MICRO MACHINES 2: TURBO TOURNAMENT

1 Drift to the right soon after the starting line, knocking as many rivals as possible off course while doing so. This should get you straight into qualifying position.

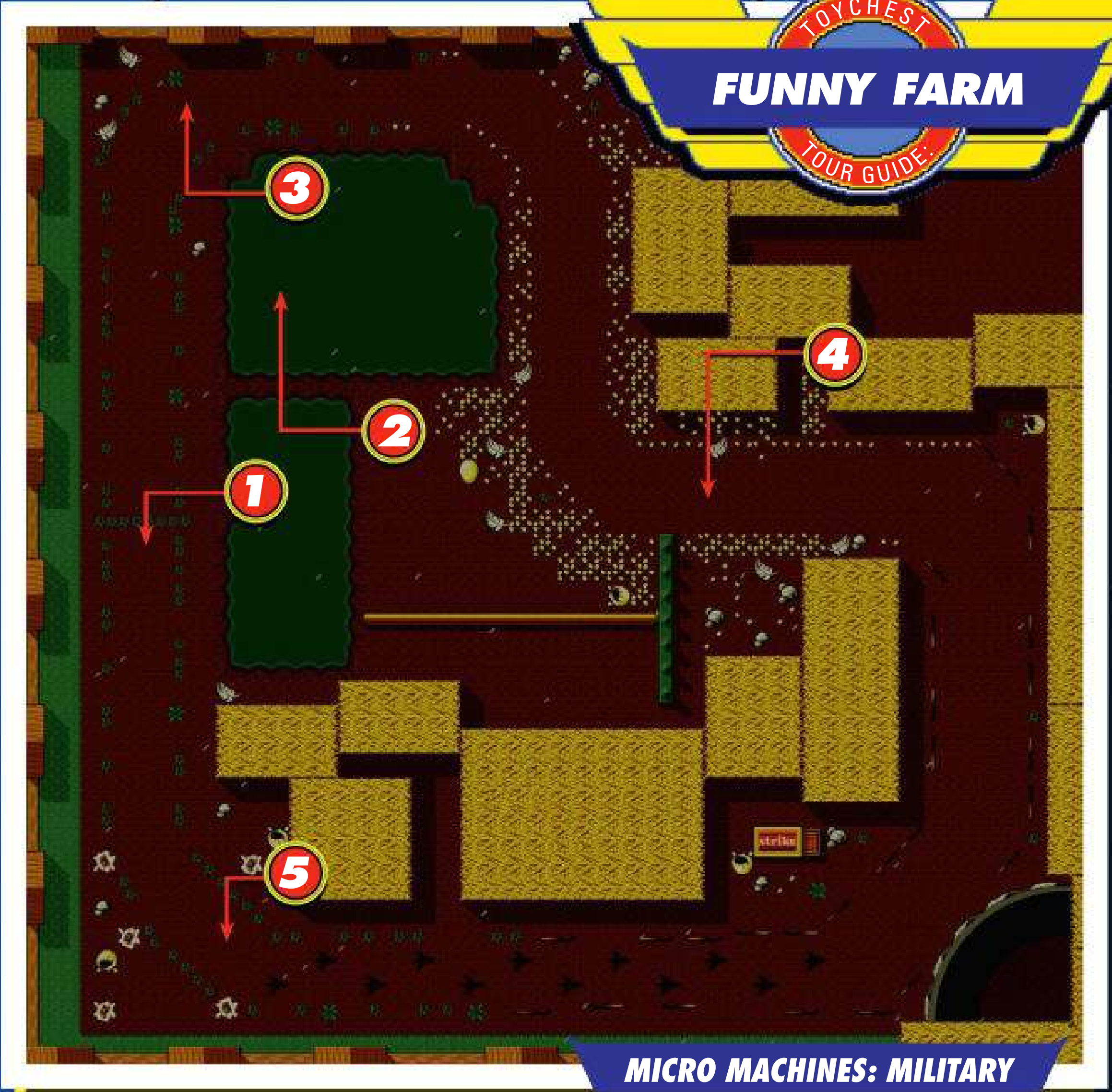
2 Hammer along the upper straight and drift at the top-right corner of the track, then speed down the next straight, keeping mid-lane since it gets narrow in places.

3 Skid around the bottom-right right-angle bend, and keep your speed down going around the sharp right leading into the hairpin at the course's centre.

4 You need to drift around the hairpin's 45-degree bends with just enough acceleration. If you pump the gas too much as you're cornering you zoom off into the rough.

5 Like the right-hand straight, the final stretch on the left has a narrow section, so keep mid-lane. In keeping with its counterpart, the sea often washes away the sides.

TOYCHEST TOUR GUIDE: FUNNY FARM



MICRO MACHINES: MILITARY

1 Get some shots in early, but bear in mind that ammo makes the racers spin on the spot. So don't drive into them, or they'll course correct and speed off ahead of you.

2 Steer clear of the dirty ponds to the right – you could lose a tank in one of those! Ignore the time-saving path between them, as you get penalised for taking it.

3 Drift around the first two bends, which tanks are remarkably good at. Try to zigzag a little, just in case someone tries to blow-off your rear end with their weapon attack.

4 Speed down the snaking s-bends, sticking as close as possible to the bales of straw. But be warned, if you hit one you'll practically come to a dead stop, so don't do that.

5 Stay slightly off course, just under the bales at the bottom of the track. This puts you in position to take the bottom-right corner that follows as tightly as possible.

» [PC] *Micro Machines: World Series* has four-player local multiplayer, and even more simultaneous vehicles in online races.

> "IT WAS AN INTERESTING CHALLENGE WORKING OUT HOW TO GET THE CARS [IN WORLD SERIES] TO WORK WELL IN A BATTLE-ARENA ENVIRONMENT"
>
> **COLIN NICHOLLS**

NES original's co-creator Paul Perrott left the games industry behind long ago, but he still meets fans of his work decades later. "It was my first job, which was really super cool, but then I moved on," Paul says on a bittersweet note. "I haven't played it since it came out. But what was interesting about it for me is that it changed the paradigm of the genre, because the way you'd lose in multiplayer was by slipping off the screen. I think that still stands up. I meet kids now, 18 or 19 year olds, who actually know what *Micro Machines* is, which I'm blown away by! So I guess it's entered into some kind of historical hall of notoriety." ✱

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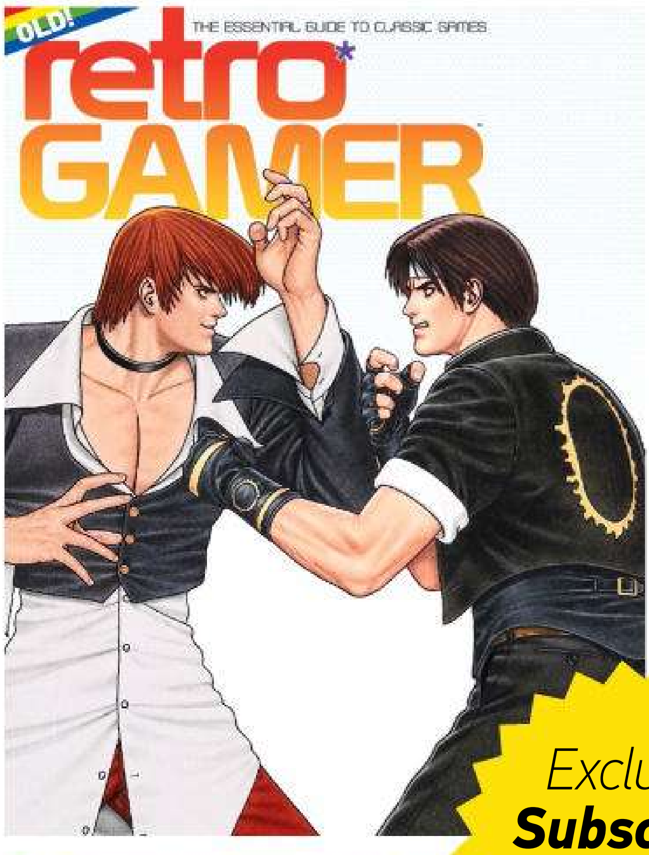
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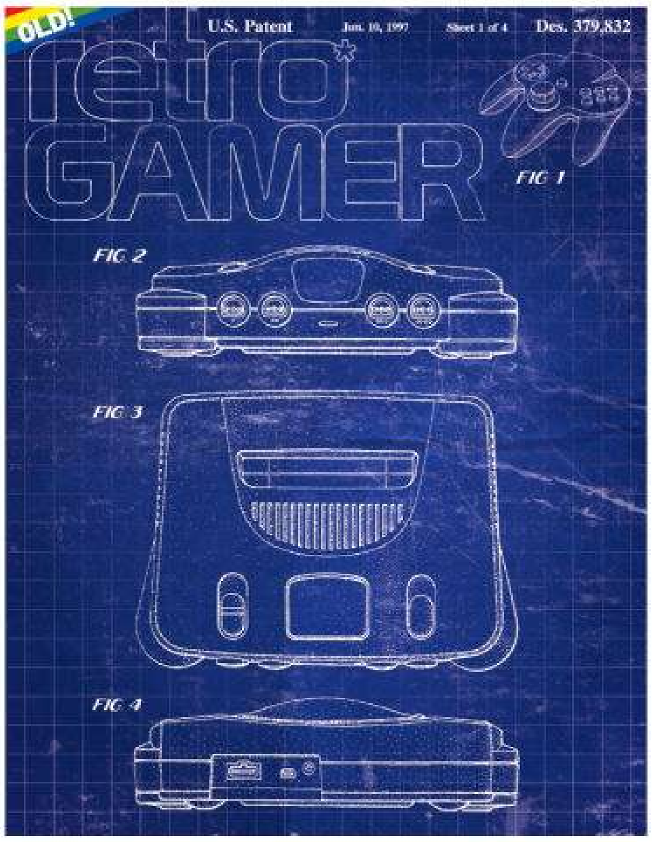
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FIG 2
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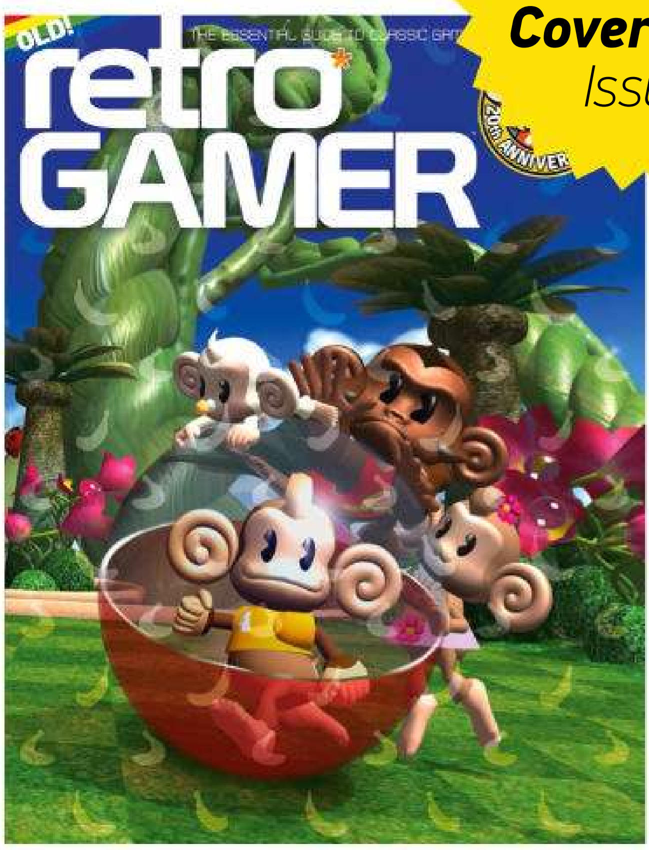
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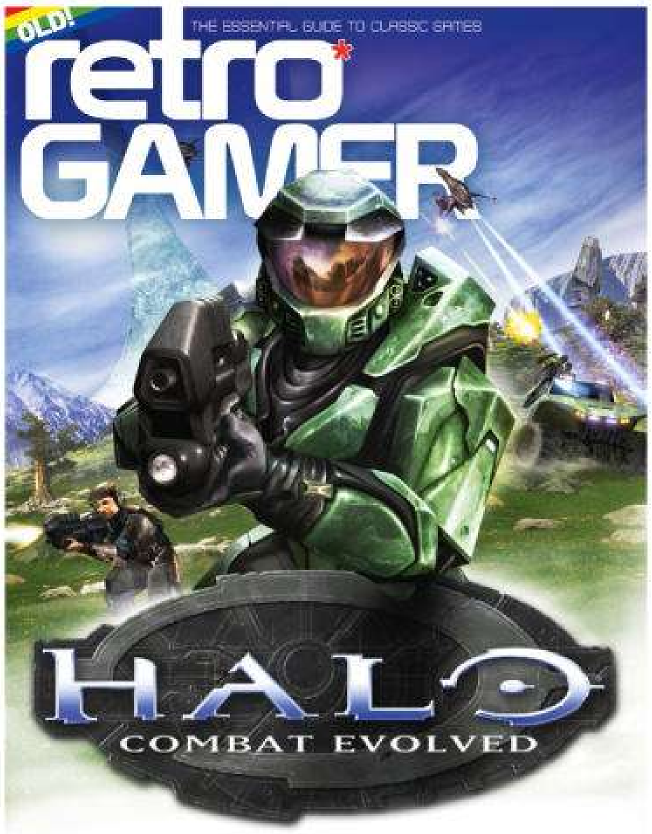
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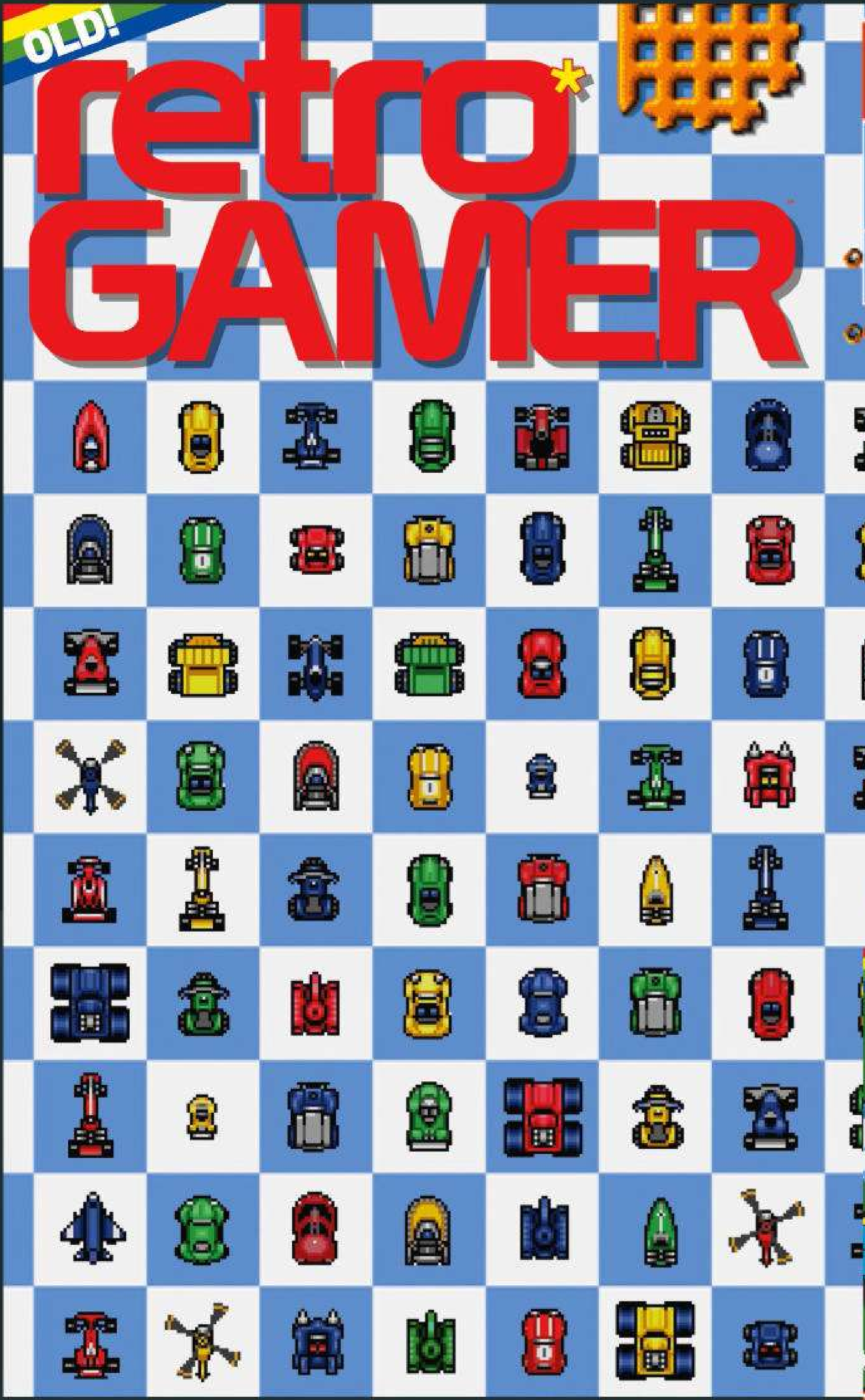
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CLASSIC MOMENTS

Out Run

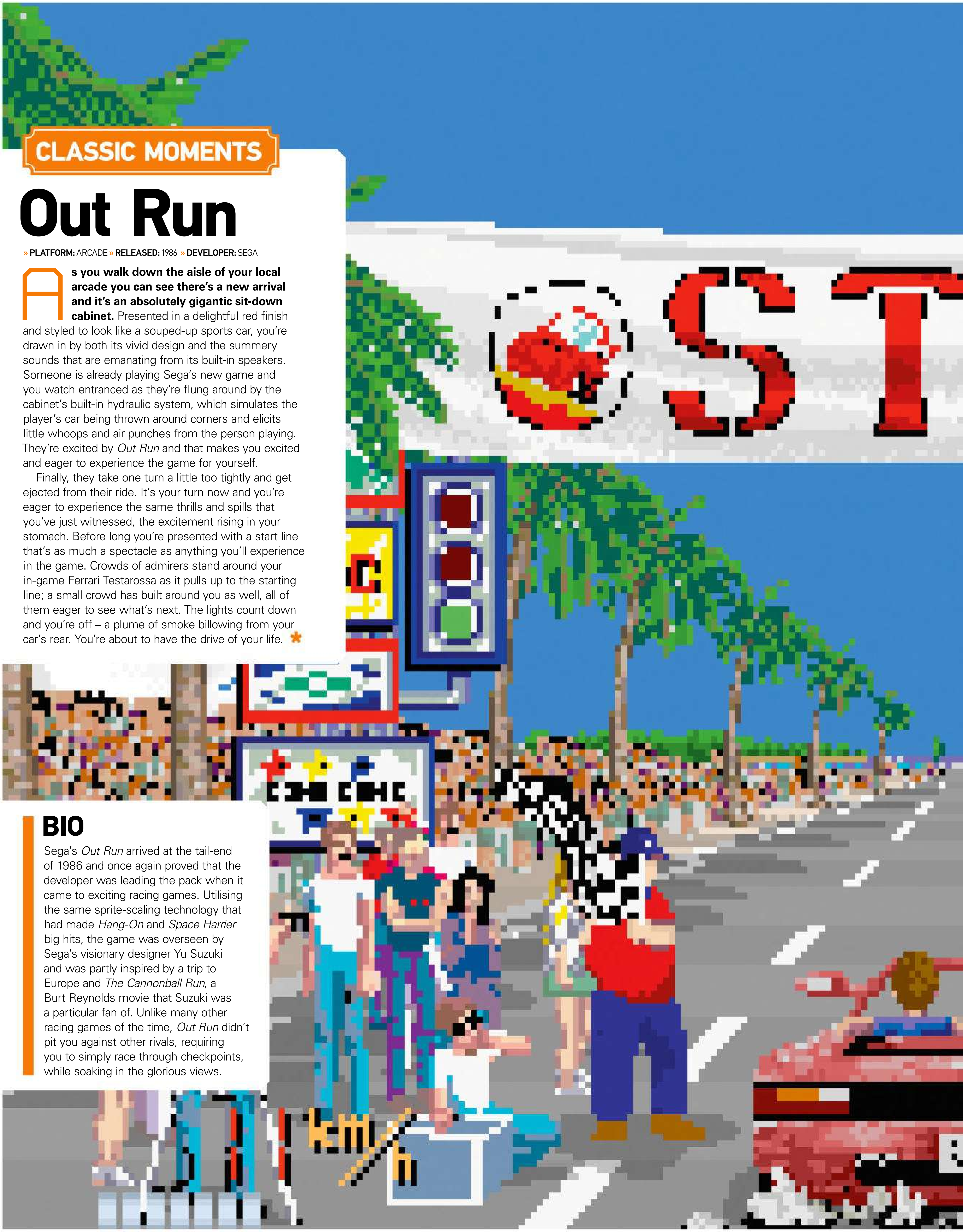
» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1986 » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

As you walk down the aisle of your local arcade you can see there's a new arrival and it's an absolutely gigantic sit-down cabinet. Presented in a delightful red finish and styled to look like a souped-up sports car, you're drawn in by both its vivid design and the summery sounds that are emanating from its built-in speakers. Someone is already playing Sega's new game and you watch entranced as they're flung around by the cabinet's built-in hydraulic system, which simulates the player's car being thrown around corners and elicits little whoops and air punches from the person playing. They're excited by *Out Run* and that makes you excited and eager to experience the game for yourself.

Finally, they take one turn a little too tightly and get ejected from their ride. It's your turn now and you're eager to experience the same thrills and spills that you've just witnessed, the excitement rising in your stomach. Before long you're presented with a start line that's as much a spectacle as anything you'll experience in the game. Crowds of admirers stand around your in-game Ferrari Testarossa as it pulls up to the starting line; a small crowd has built around you as well, all of them eager to see what's next. The lights count down and you're off – a plume of smoke billowing from your car's rear. You're about to have the drive of your life. *

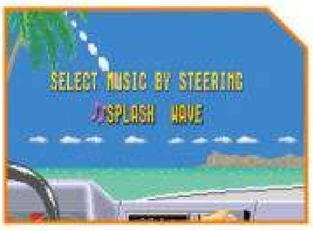
BIO

Sega's *Out Run* arrived at the tail-end of 1986 and once again proved that the developer was leading the pack when it came to exciting racing games. Utilising the same sprite-scaling technology that had made *Hang-On* and *Space Harrier* big hits, the game was overseen by Sega's visionary designer Yu Suzuki and was partly inspired by a trip to Europe and *The Cannonball Run*, a Burt Reynolds movie that Suzuki was a particular fan of. Unlike many other racing games of the time, *Out Run* didn't pit you against other rivals, requiring you to simply race through checkpoints, while soaking in the glorious views.



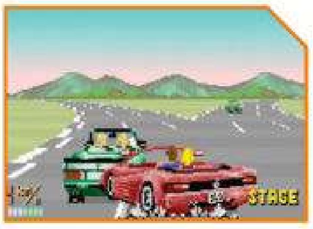
MORE CLASSIC OUT RUN MOMENTS

Radio Ga Ga



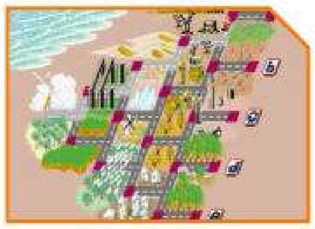
Music wasn't uncommon in videogames at the time of *Out Run*'s release, but what was unusual was the ability to choose what music you wanted to listen to while you played. *Out Run* gives you a choice of three songs: *Splash Wave*, *Magical Sound Shower* and *Passing Breeze* and they still sound fantastic. Best of all you get to select them via a nifty on-screen radio.

Decisions, Decisions



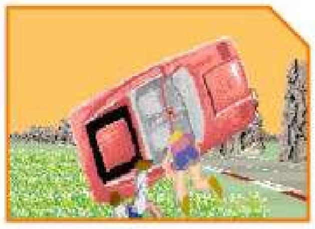
While it wasn't the first arcade racing game to feature multiple routes (Tatsumi's *TX-1* beat it by a good three years) we'd argue that it's one of the first examples that many gamers encountered. The left route is typically the easiest but you've only a few seconds to decide. Make your choice and look out for other vehicles.

Get Mapped



Even once you've run out of time, *Out Run* has one last neat trick to pull. You're treated to a colourful map that not only highlights that there are multiple routes through the game, but you can also see how close you came to completing them. Needless to say it acts as a great incentive to have one more try.

Road Spill



Of course it was going to happen. After all, you're driving a Ferrari Testarossa at insane speeds around blind corners and past other cars and huge articulated lorries. It was inevitable that you'd eventually hit something, but when you do it's still spectacular. Your car flips several times through the air, while you and your girl spill out like popcorn. Ouch!

THE MAKING OF CHILLER

DEAD PEOPLE ARE COOL

A decade after *Death Race* had incensed the guardians of taste and decency, Howell Ivy helped create an even gorier arcade experience. There will be blood...

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY

IN THE KNOW

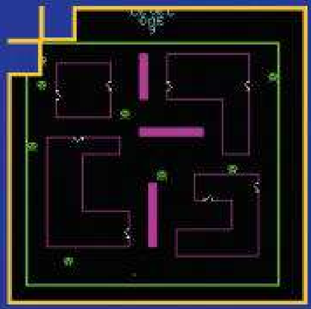
» **PUBLISHER:** EXIDY

» **DEVELOPER:** EXIDY

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, NES

» **GENRE:** LIGHTGUN SHOOTER



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEATH RACE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

CIRCUS
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

VENTURE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1981

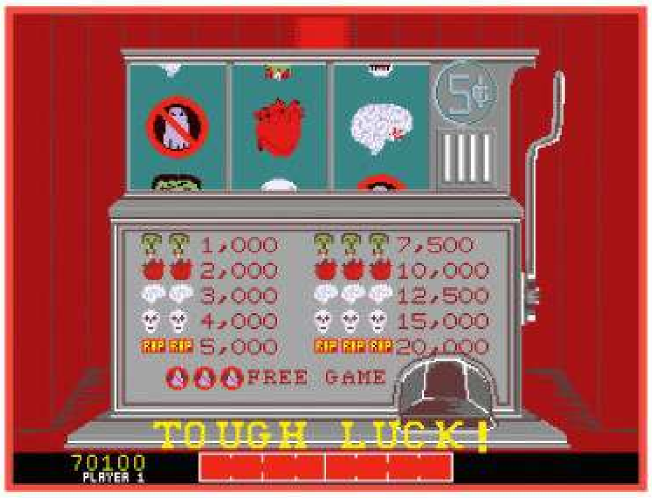
» Howell Ivy, the father of the videogame nasty and a thoroughly nice chap.

"We were trying to be renegades," grins Howell Ivy, a man not unaccustomed to ruffling feathers. "*Chiller* brought Exidy back to being front and centre. Yes, it was controversial but we wanted to do something different in the industry and go out on the edge."

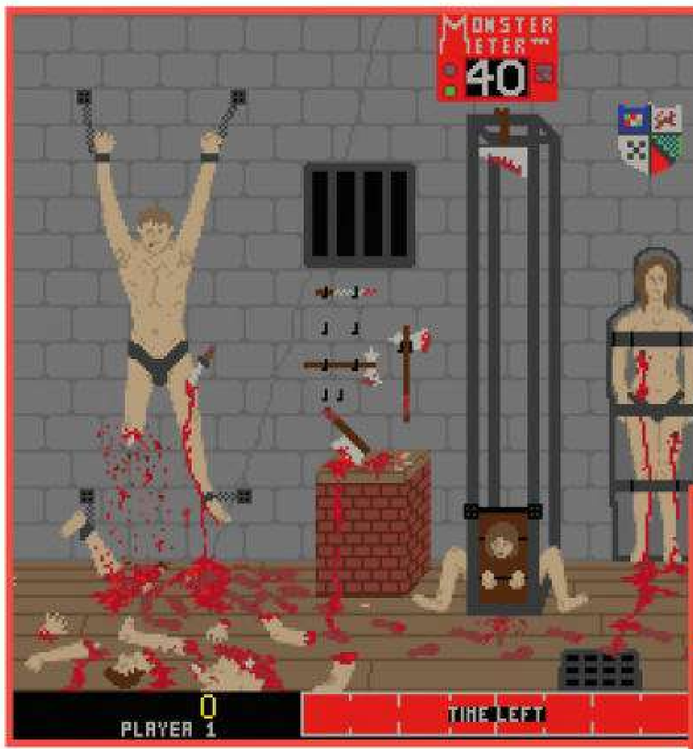
Chiller, a lightgun shooter set in a torture chamber which required sadistic players to dismember and decapitate hapless, half-naked victims, was certainly edgy for the mid-Eighties. It was not the first time Howell had courted controversy, either. After starting his coin-op career at Ramtek, producing proto-*Breakout* title *Clean Sweep* amongst others, he left to join Exidy, headed up by former colleague Pete Kaufman. They produced a promising overhead driving game, *Destruction Derby*, in 1975 which they licensed to the more established Chicago Coin, who released it as *Demolition Derby*. But when payments from their licensee were not forthcoming, Exidy needed to change gear.

"We had to produce another product we could sell to pay our employees and keep Exidy open," says Howell. "I changed some of the graphics and the sound and a little of the gameplay and called it *Death Race*. I had no clue it would upset people."

It wasn't just the title that caused offence. Rather than crashing into other cars as in the original game, the player was now tasked with mowing down pedestrians against the clock, each kill being marked with a gravestone. The graphics may have been primitive black and white stick figures but this was 1976 and what was deemed 'acceptable content' in this new creative medium was still being determined. The violent theme of the game was picked up by news companies and featured in an episode of *60 Minutes*, which



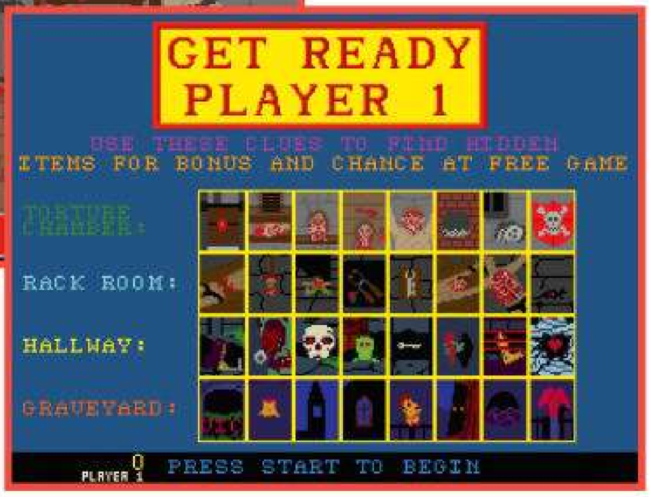
» [Arcade] *Chiller* features a fruit machine bonus game, with cherries and bells replaced by hearts and brains.



» [Arcade] The opening torture chamber scene presents you with guillotines, vices and bloodied victims to finish off. Not for the squeamish.

october 1983
RePlay
coin-op entertainment
Exidy
Hangs a Big "Ten!"

» The front cover of *RePlay* magazine in October 1983 featured the Exidy founders surfing the success of *Crossbow*. That's Howell in the middle.



GET READY
PLAYER 1

USE THESE CLUES TO FIND HIDDEN ITEMS FOR BONUS AND CHANCE AT FREE GAME

TORTURE CHAMBER:

RACK ROOM:

HALLWAY:

GRAVEYARD:

PLAYER 1 0

PRESS START TO BEGIN

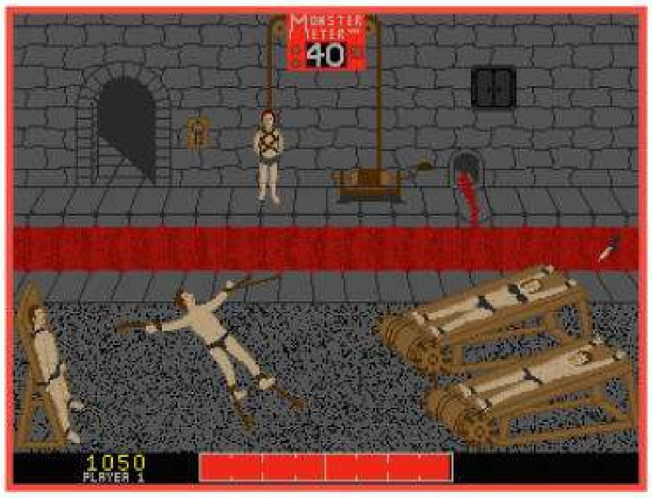
» [Arcade] Each of the four main stages have a set number of 'clues' to find to unlock the final level.

denounced the corrupting effect of videogames on the nation's children.

"But you were running over gremlins not humans," protests Howell. "Look at the artwork on the cabinet! People just interpreted it differently and we had serious threats from people who said they were going to come and shut us down. We had to hire security guards for our premises… but to be honest, it only helped sales. What do they say about no such thing as bad publicity? It really put us on the map. We were a small company, only about a dozen of us at that point, and our visibility rose hugely. When we released our next game, people had heard of us!"

> "CHILLER BROUGHT EXIDY BACK TO BEING FRONT AND CENTRE. YES, IT WAS CONTROVERSIAL BUT WE WANTED TO GO OUT ON THE EDGE"
> **HOWELL IVY**

Exidy built on the success of *Death Race*, usually credited as the first 'videogame nasty', and produced a string of original arcade titles in the late-Seventies into the early Eighties, from the cute, clown-flipping *Circus* to the ambitious dungeon-crawler, *Venture*. By 1983, though, the whole coin-op business was in a slump and if it was going to survive, Exidy needed to bring something new to the arcade experience.



» [Arcade] The rack room sees victims literally ripped in two, all to an unsettling score of screams and moans.

"It began with lightpens," says Howell, "I took that concept of pointing at things on the screen and started experimenting with lenses and focal lengths. It took a while to develop the lightgun technology but I ended up with a pen diode with a single lens which was approximately one-inch in diameter. I was aware of how cathode ray tubes worked, how they scanned the lines [of the screen], so when you pulled the trigger, the whole screen flashes for one frame. Optics in the gun would pick up where you were pointing on-screen during that one frame. You can then communicate that to the player so he knows what he's hit."

Electro-mechanical gun games had been a stalwart of arcades since the start of the 20th century and by the Thirties, companies like Seeburg, with its *Ray-O-Lite* series, allowed trigger happy players to shoot rays of light at moving targets with sensors attached. The Seventies saw further developments in the home market, starting with the Magnavox Odyssey, designed by Ralph Baer, having a gun peripheral available to buy and many early TV Tennis machines came bundled with a plastic pistol and a target shooting game alongside the *Pong* clones. Atari had experimented with lightguns for *Qwak!* in 1974, a duck-shooting coin-op which met with little commercial success, so when Exidy decided to bring its far more sophisticated technology to the arcades in the early Eighties, it certainly felt like a new concept.

"We used a mirror to give the player an illusion of depth," explains Howell. "You're not looking directly at the screen – the screen is down below and you're looking at a reflection. That gives you the perception of depth and it makes the image look two-and-a-half feet further back. You don't have a screen right in front of you so it means the movement of the weapon is relatively small. You can aim at the screen easily and quickly."

For its first title to use this ingenious set up, Exidy decided to eschew a gun and go for something more medieval. The theme for *Crossbow* drew on *Dungeons & Dragons* and cast you as one of a band of bold adventurers, travelling through desert, forest and across a rickety rope bridge before entering a foreboding castle and facing its dark lord. Your task was to protect your party from attack by accurate arrow-fire and is a very early example of the 'escort mission' which was to become a mainstay of first-

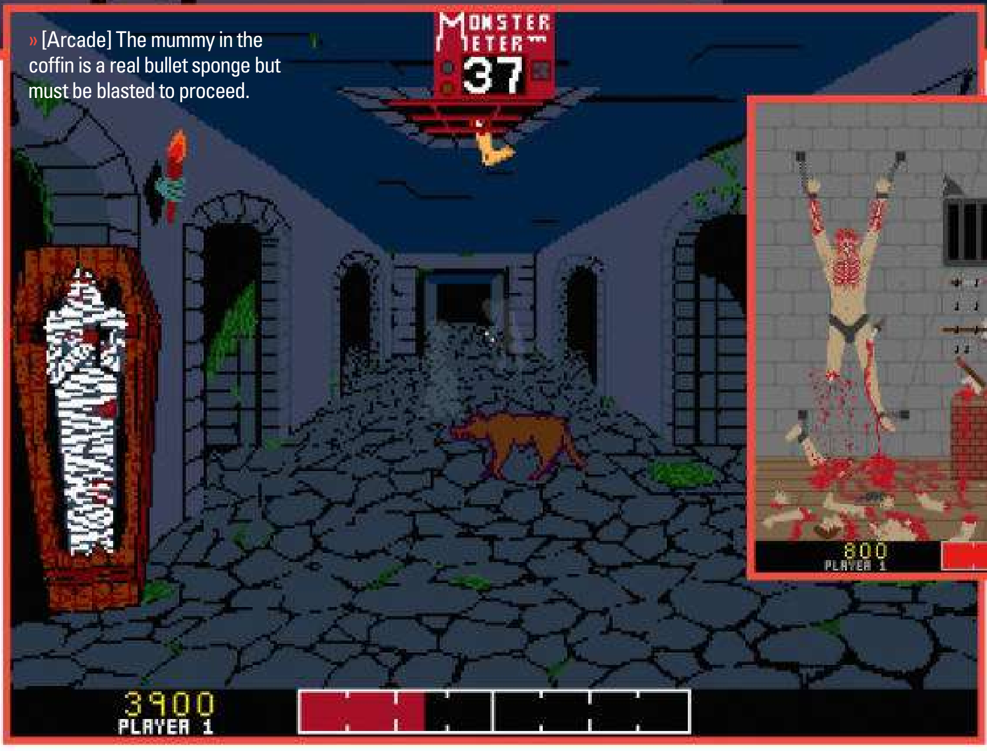
» Howell in 1976, posing with *Death Race*, in a shirt more shocking than the game.

BAN THIS SICK FILTH

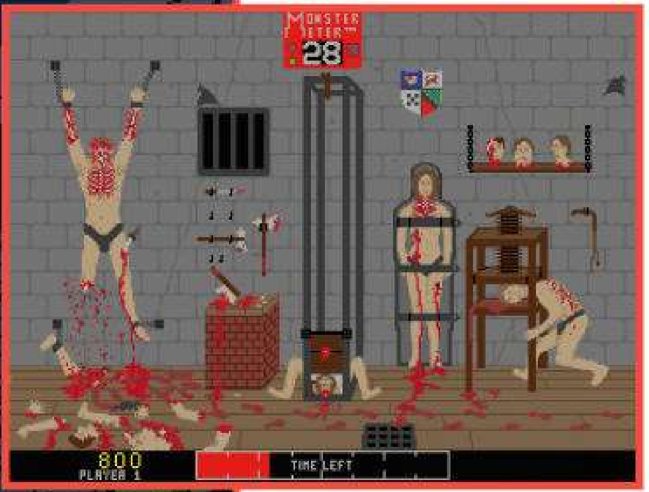
HOWELL IVY ON INADVERTENTLY CREATING 'VIDEOGAME NASTIES'

Given Howell was responsible for not one but two 'videogame nasties', we wondered if he had any regrets? "I'm not ashamed at all," he replies. "With *Death Race*, it was inadvertent. We were innocent going in, unaware we would create such controversy. I suppose with *Chiller*, we knew it was going to be touchy. I was expecting some controversy but we needed that to sell games."

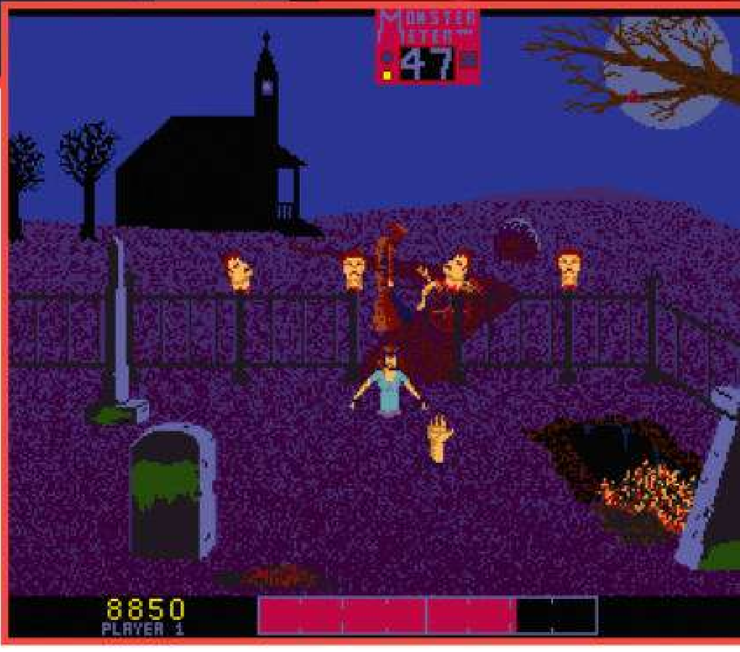
So how does he feel about the whole issue of censoring sex and violence in videogames? He pauses before answering. "We can't control people's imagination and their desires and if they don't get ideas from videogames, they'll get them from somewhere else. You have a choice: play the game or not, just like you can turn over the TV channel. If it offends you don't play it or don't watch it. Then again you don't want games to be a training ground…"



» [Arcade] The mummy in the coffin is a real bullet sponge but must be blasted to proceed.



» [Arcade] The secret is to trigger the various instruments of torture to swiftly execute the captives. That vice is asking to be twisted.



» [Arcade] Heads on spikes and dismembered hands rising from the grave. Spooky stuff.

person shooter games in subsequent decades.

"The biggest challenge was the sand castings for making the crossbow itself," notes Howell, reminding us that Exidy not only wrote the software, it manufactured the cabinets as well. "It had to feel good when you moved it and strong enough so you couldn't rip it off the machine and walk out the door with it. That was a problem with gun games…"

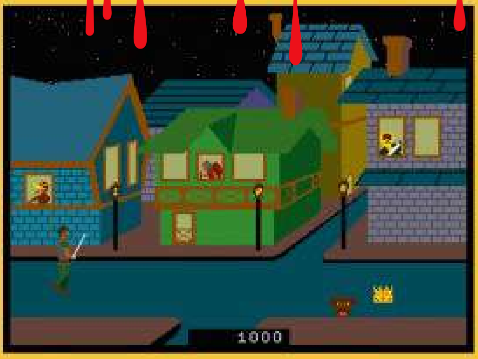
It seems some US players wanted to take the right to bear arms somewhat literally but then *Crossbow* certainly stood out in arcades on its release in 1983. Howell estimates over 2,000 were produced, a considerable success in those difficult days for the coin-op business, and a string of lightgun games inevitably followed (see 'Children Of Crossbow' boxout). By 1986, though, Exidy had created shooters around obvious themes like World War II and the Wild West and were looking for something different to base its next title on, one which might reignite interest in the whole genre. "At Exidy, we knew difference sold and we were kind of creating our own 'me too' [products]," Howell acknowledges. "We knew we had to try something new so we thought, 'Let's go horror.' Maybe it was a gimmick, maybe we were naïve, but we just wanted to ship product… and we didn't think it was going to be as controversial as it was."

We cannot help smiling at that last remark as it would be one thing setting a shooter in a world of ghosts, ghouls and graveyards, which do indeed feature in *Chiller*'s later levels. By setting the first two scenes of the game in a torture chamber, with victims chained to racks and poised to be decapitated by guillotine, Exidy was clearly going for shock value. Things might just have been deemed acceptable if you as the player were charged with rescuing these helpless prisoners from their grisly fate, but no – you were the torturer. You were the one who blasted chunks of flesh from bone, ripped bodies in two and crushed skulls into a bloody pulp. How could you possibly have thought this was not going to be controversial, Howell? "Yeah but they weren't really people," he grins, rather cryptically. "There was a switch on the game which let you make them all green. The operator could decide whether to have flesh colour or green people and green blood. To be fair, very few operators put it on green…"

It seems Exidy pre-empted Nintendo's penchant for turning blood from red to green to appease the moral majority in the decade to follow and with this dubious 'get out' clause, the team at Exidy really let their imaginations run wild when it came to creative executions. "It was a case of anything goes," Howell laughs, "as long as we could display it effectively on the screen. Could we make it look like a knife or an axe was actually stabbing someone? Could we make a vice look like it was really crushing a human head?"

Despite all the pixelated on-screen gore, the software team of Larry Hutcherson, Vic Tolomei and Ken Nicholson actually coded in a fair degree of subtlety to the gameplay. Frenzied blasting is not as effective as carefully targeting and triggering the various torture devices on display and each level contains hidden 'clues' which must be shot to unlock the grand finale. We recognise that some of the nuances may have gone unnoticed due to the distracting nature of the regular decapitations and

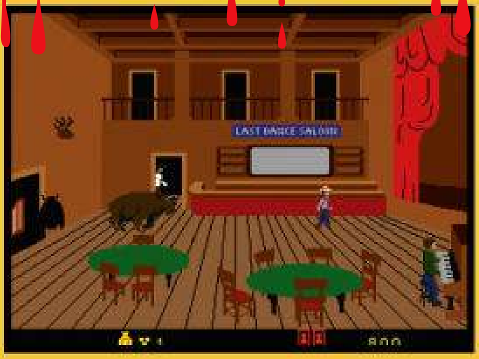
CHILDREN OF



CROSSBOW

1983

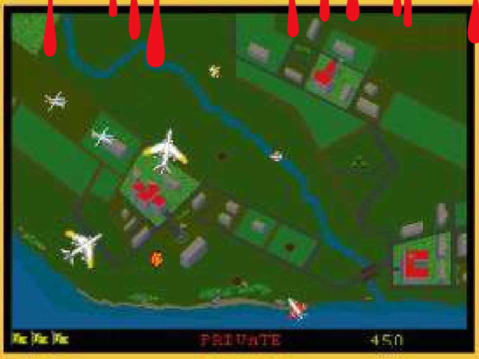
Exidy's first lightgun title sets the template, with varied scenes, branching paths, characterful graphics and the idea of protecting your comrades rather than simply blasting everything in sight. The final boss looks like Terry Thomas, too.



CHEYENNE

1984

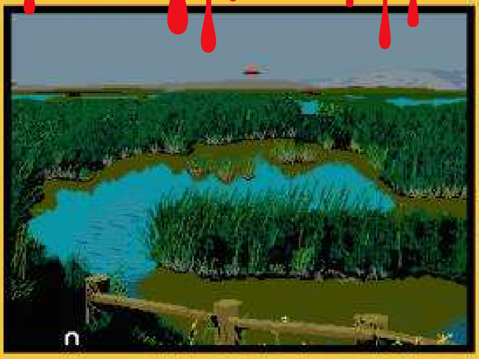
We head out West for the follow-up to *Crossbow*, which features saloon shoot-outs, a spooky ghost town, sniping at bandits from atop a stagecoach and, in a slap in the face to all Elton John fans, you do get to shoot the piano player.



COMBAT

1985

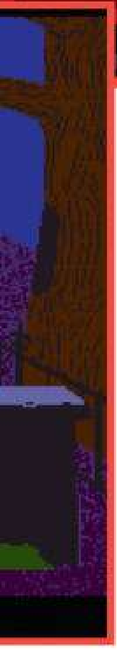
This really shows Exidy's ambition to do something different with the formula. Set in WWII, you can select various theatres of war from a world map and fight the foe on land, sea and air. The naval battles remind us of the C64's *Beach-Head*, in a good way.



CLAY PIGEON

1986

Another game beginning with C and it's back to basics this time, with the chance to shoot clay birds before moving on to the real thing. The gameplay is simpler than previous titles but Exidy goes all out on the visuals with some rather beautiful backdrops.



the agonised screams and moans emanating from the cabinet.

"All the speech and sound effects are sampled and done by Vic, Larry and Ken," says Howell, proudly. "Those are their voices you can hear. If you walked past their office and heard screaming, you knew they were being productive!"

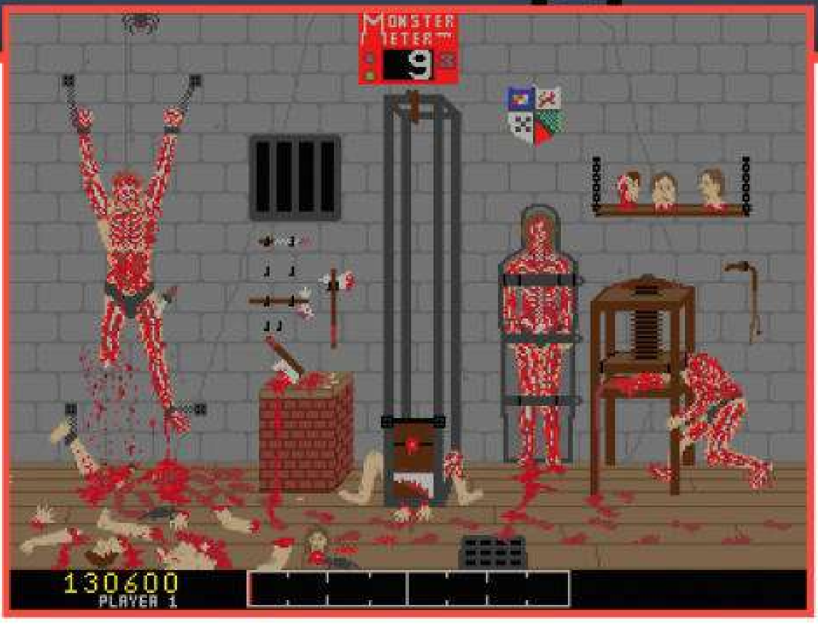
> **"ALL THE SAMPLES IN THE GAME WERE DONE BY THE SOFTWARE TEAM. IF YOU WALKED PAST THEIR OFFICE AND HEARD SCREAMING, YOU KNEW THEY WERE BEING PRODUCTIVE!"**
> **HOWELL IVY**

Released in 1986, *Chiller* did decent business, with Howell estimating Exidy sold between 1,000 and 1,500 machines. Though it did not replicate the impressive sales of *Crossbow* nor the controversy of *Death Race*, *Chiller* deserves its footnote in videogame history as an early example of how the medium handled potentially shocking subject matter, as well as an indication of how quickly blood and guts were becoming an integral part of gaming. "Times had changed when *Chiller* came out and shooting people was pretty normal," Howell says. "We did get some complaints that it was too gory but far less than for *Death Race*. It seems shooting people's arms and heads off still upset some folks. I think it was used more as an example of how videogames were corrupting the children of America, as a news story."

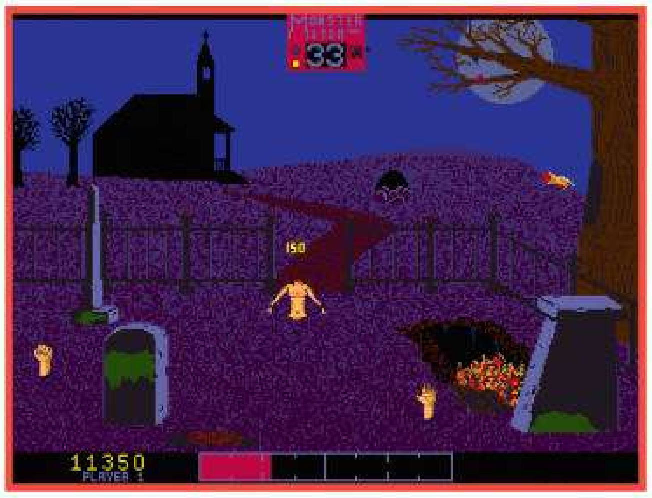
Howell admits to having an enduring affection for *Chiller*, partly due to the ripple of controversy it caused but also because it was to be the final game he was involved with before he sold his interest in Exidy and left the company he helped found. He later joined Sega, a developer with a rich history of lightgun games, from *Safari Hunt* to *Virtua Cop* and *The House Of The Dead* series. Gun games are still going strong and, along with driving games, are the titles you're most likely to play today in arcades, cinema foyers and bowling alleys. Does he look back with pride at the genre he helped shape? "I've not really thought of it that way but now you bring it up, I did create something new and it was copied by many other people. It kind of started the whole first-person shooter style of game, too. So yeah, I guess it gives me a warm, fuzzy feeling."

Warmer than those semi-clad captives in *Chiller*'s torture chamber, we imagine. ✱

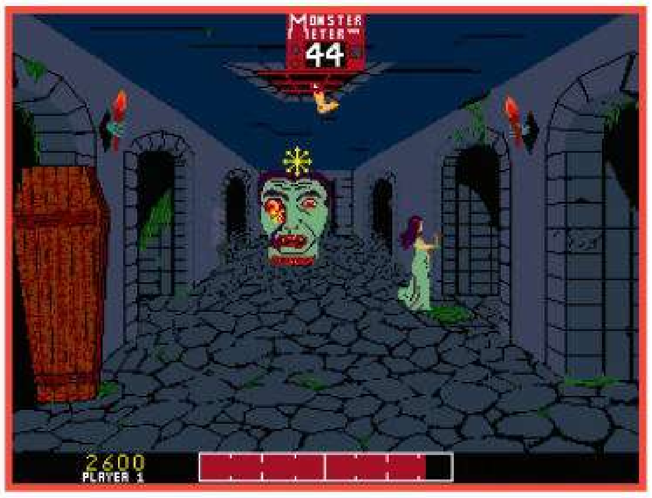
Thanks to the Ivy family for use of original photos and Martyn Carroll for additional help.



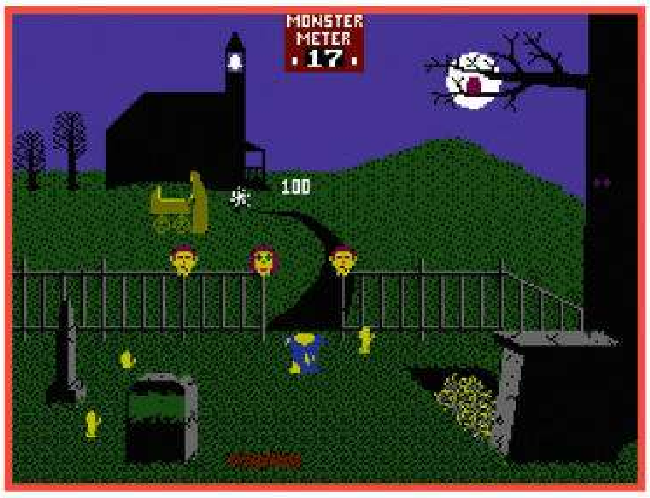
» [Arcade] Arcade operators could flip a dip switch in the machine and turn the blood and flesh to green. Few did.



» [Arcade] The graveyard level contains some brief nudity, if you can spot it through all the gore.



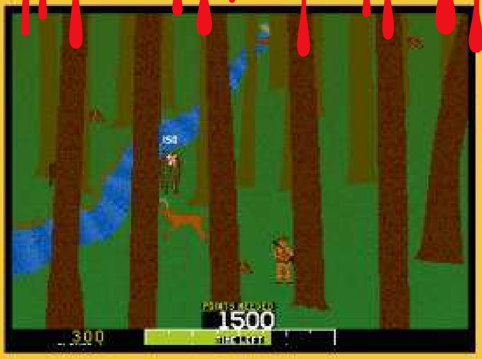
» [Arcade] The hallway scene is slightly less gruesome than the preceding levels, though the dog carrying a severed leg is pretty grim.



» [NES] An unlicensed version of *Chiller* made it to the NES and was published by American Game Cartridges. It's not as gory and starts off in a graveyard.

CROSSBOW

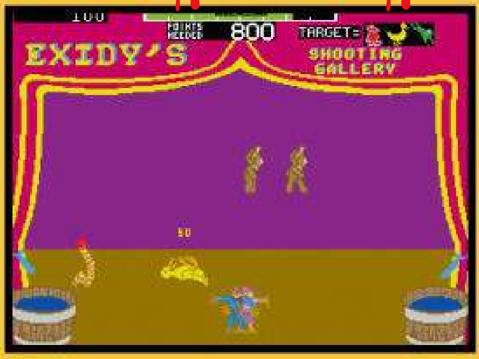
THE SPAWN OF EXIDY'S FIRSTBORN WERE CERTAINLY A DIVERSE BUNCH



CRACKSHOT

1987

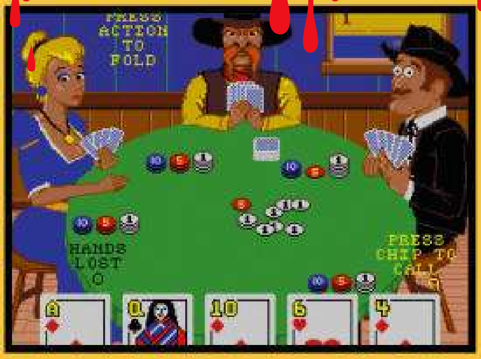
This is named on-screen during *Chiller*'s attract sequence but seems to have had a full release the following year. It offers a diverse collection of challenges, from rabbit hunting to shooting hooded KKK members. What's not to like?



HIT N MISS

1987

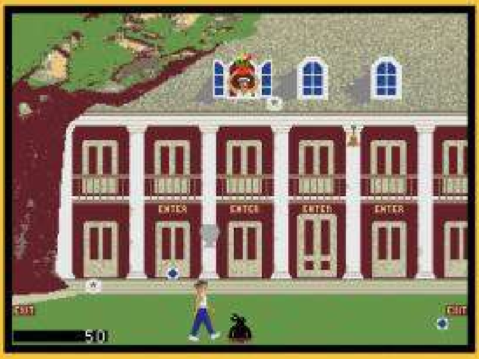
This takes the minigame idea further and brings in puzzle elements to the surreal shooting scenarios. From triggering apple falls to crushing giant insects to keeping water flowing through pipes via tactical sharp-shooting, *Point Blank* owes it a debt.



SHOWDOWN

1988

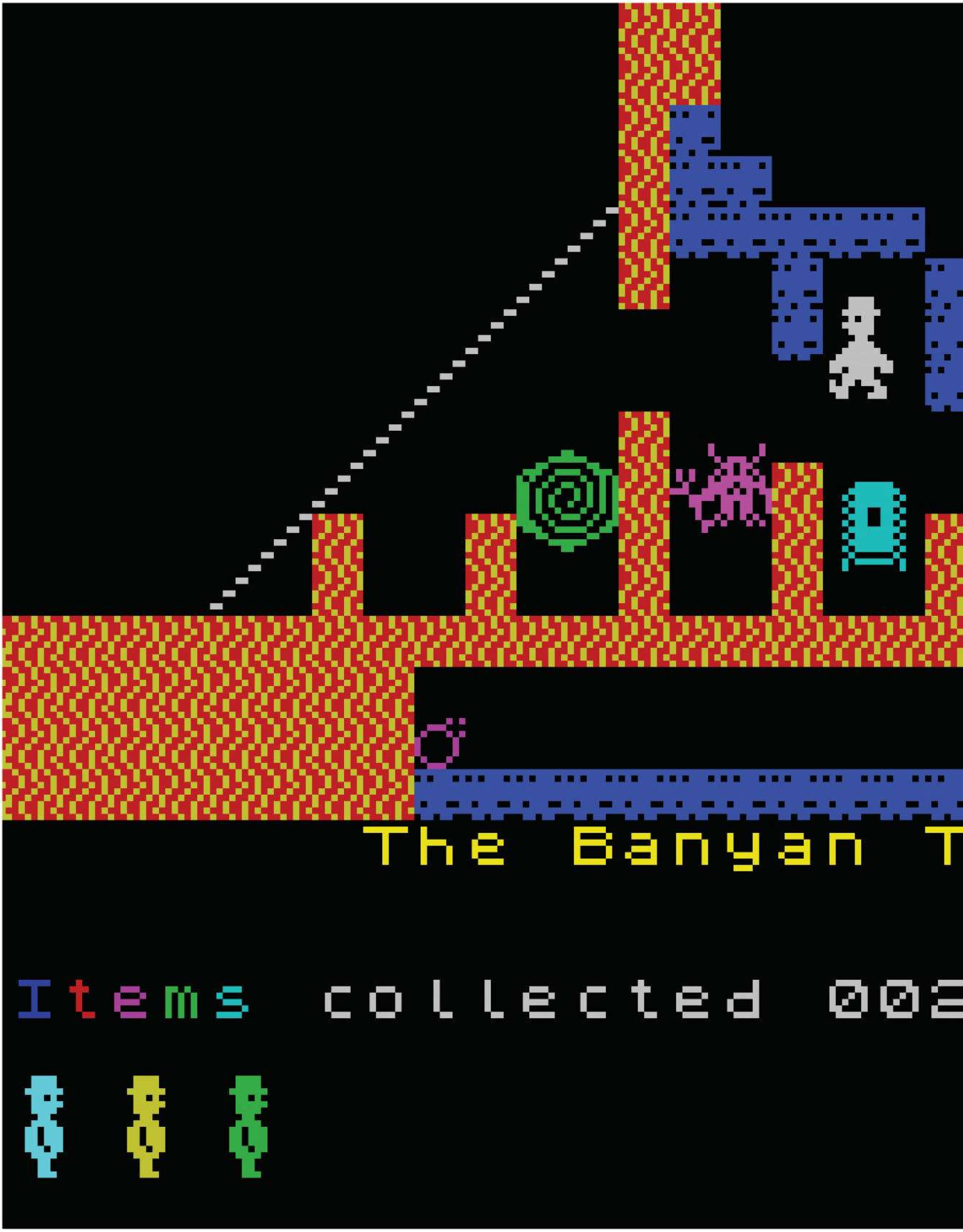
Exidy returns to the Wild West but this time you use your gun to play a rudimentary game of poker against three computer opponents. Yes, you get to see who has the fastest draw between hands but mainly it's cards, not cowboys. Very odd.



WHODUNIT

1988

Exidy's final gun game again tries something different by having you explore a plush manor house populated by some great Eighties stereotypes, locate various keys and finally open a chest in the attic to reveal the killer. All while wearing a headband.



The Banyan T

Items collected 002

Jet Set Willy

JUST KEEP MAPPING

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1984
» SOFTWARE PROJECTS

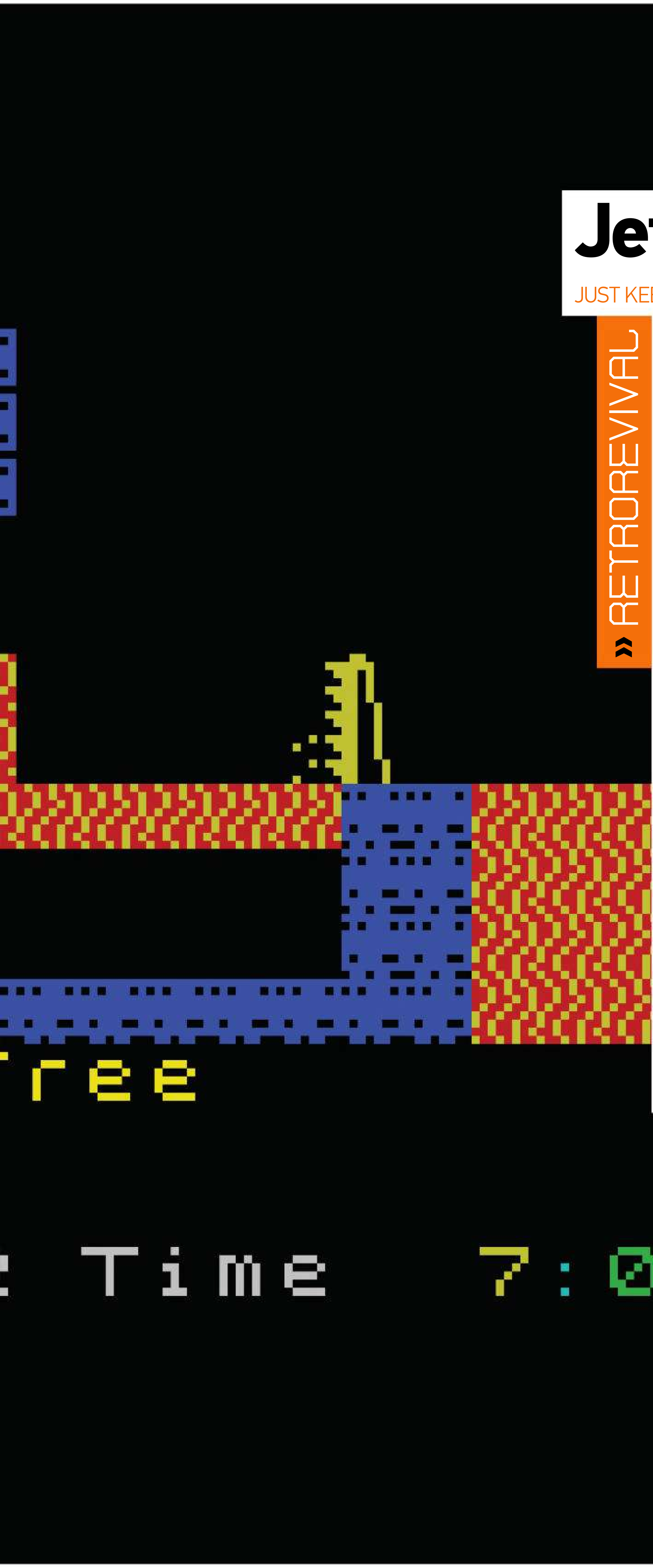
If you know me personally, it's become something of a running joke that I'm terrible with directions. I struggle to give concise directions to a location when asked for it and I get myself hopelessly lost even when going to places I've visited many times in the past. In short, I'm a bit of a nightmare.

I don't know why my sense of place is so bad, but it may explain why I used to love making maps to videogames when I was a kid. To me, one of the best things about playing a new game was discovering that there were new areas beyond that first screen and I loved to explore these huge game worlds. However, I could never remember where specific things were, so I soon found myself grabbing some graph paper and making notes.

Before long I found out that some of my other friends also liked to map their games and a few of us would get together on a Saturday morning or an evening in a bid to complete one of the hardest games of all time – Matthew Smith's *Jet Set Willy*.

That game was my Everest as a child and I would play it religiously on my Amstrad while my friends would hack his way through the Spectrum version. We had combined all our maps together and had explored a good two-thirds of the game between us and now were going to try and complete it.

There was just one small problem – none of us could get past The Banyan Tree screen. It didn't matter how many times we tried, it felt impossible and we would talk endlessly about what was beyond it. We doggedly worked through the rest of the game and eventually managed to see most of what *Jet Set Willy* had to offer. The Banyan Tree always eluded us, though. Obviously, I now know exactly what lies behind it because I've watched plenty of videos, but back then its allure and mystery was enough to cause me to spend a fortune on fancy graph paper. ✱

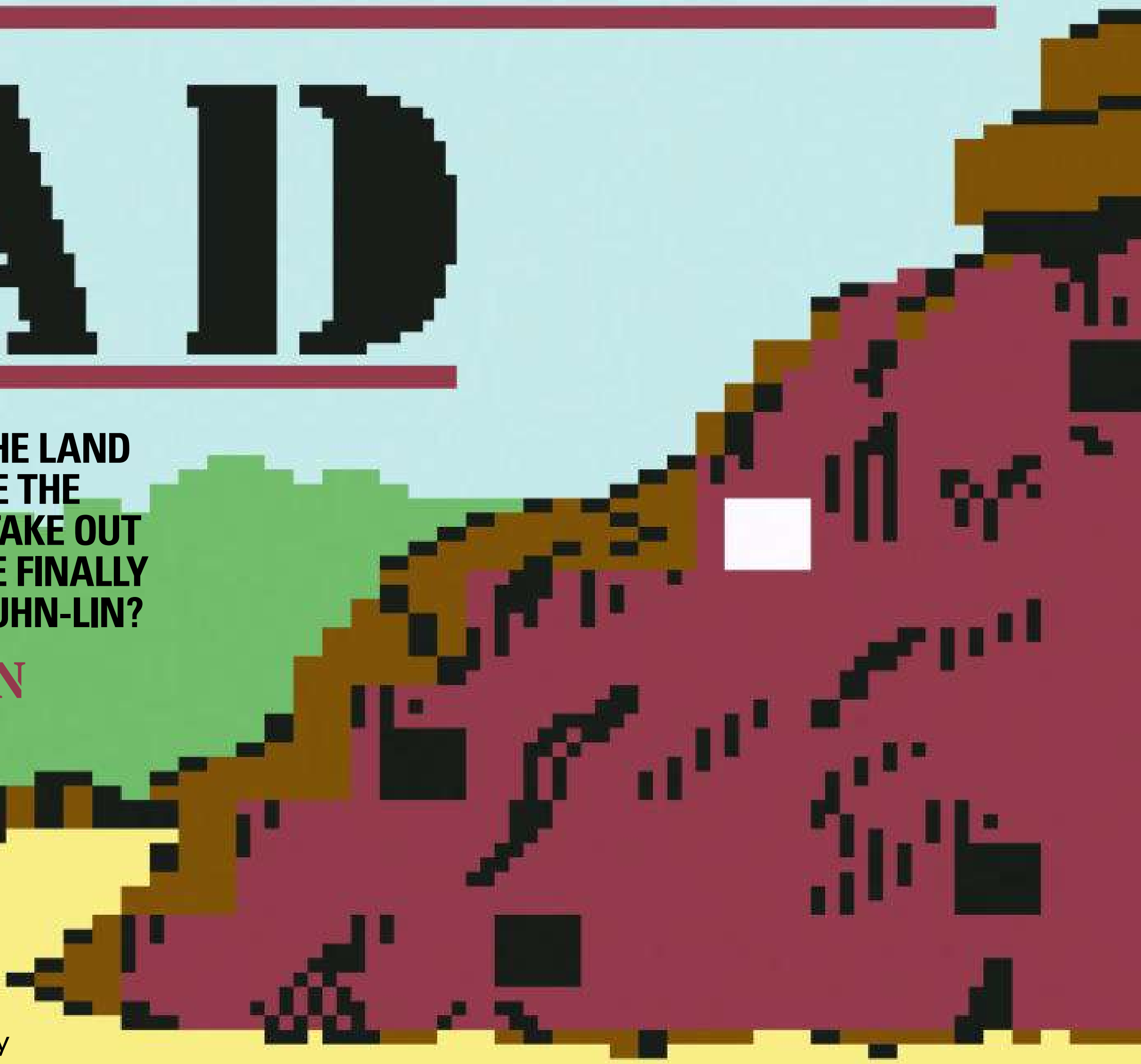


ULTIMATE GUIDE

BEACH-HEAD

A VICIOUS DICTATOR HAS TAKEN CONTROL OVER THE LAND AND MUST BE ELIMINATED! CAN YOU NAVIGATE THE TREACHEROUS WATERS OF THE HIDDEN PASSAGE, TAKE OUT ENEMY FIGHTER PLANES, SHIPS AND TANKS BEFORE FINALLY HAVING A CRACK AT THE OMINOUS FORTRESS OF KUHN-LIN?

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



With its varied vistas, fluctuating gameplay, tactics and intense shooting action, *Beach-Head* doesn't feel like a game from 1983. Originally released by Access Software and designed by Bruce Carver, it's a videogame that belies its time, which is appropriate given the vague backstory that accompanies it.

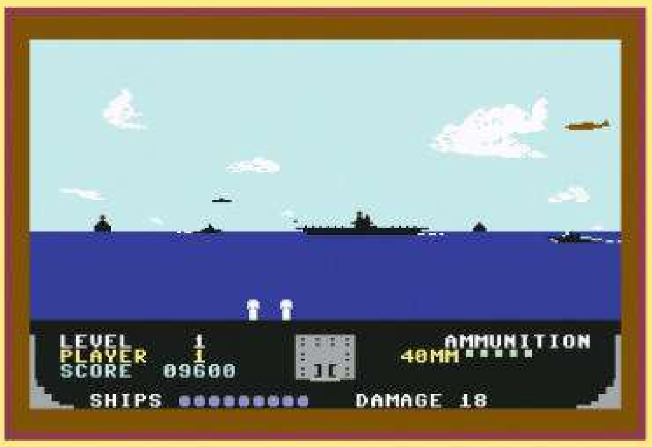
A ruthless dictator has taken control of an unnamed peaceful island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean and presumably around the time of World War II given the military vehicles on display. As chief commander of the opposing forces, the player guides their armies, both land and naval, towards the dictator's base, a formidable cannon fortress known as Kuhn-Lin. *Beach-Head* opens with an aerial reconnaissance map, the player's fleet represented by a collection of four dots. A cavernous bay lays to the south, the enemy fleet poised to intercept as soon as the player ventures towards the yellow beaches.

To the west, a gentle alarm blinks casually; here lies the (not so) hidden passage, a slim channel that, upon successful negotiation, will allow the player to avoid a large segment of the enemy attack by surprising its fleet.

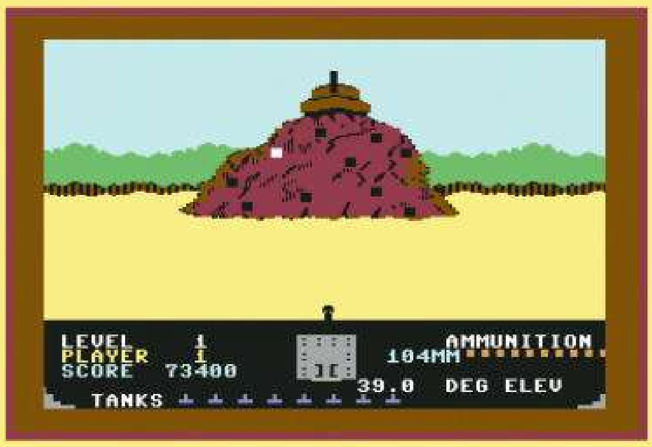
It's the first choice of *Beach-Head* and while the hidden passage may appear an easy option, it is anything but. Each ship in the player's fleet has to be guided from one side of the narrow strait to the other; strike one of the many mines or torpedoes and the vessel is consigned to the depths and the fleet is a little less prepared for the next battle.

> "IT CHANGED MY PERCEPTION OF WHAT AN ARCADE GAME COULD BE"
> DAVID J ANDERSON

Taken aback by the sudden appearance of your fleet, the enemy is caught cold, but recovers to launch a squadron of fighters against you from its imposing aircraft carrier. At the bottom of the screen are your guns, a powerful brace of 40mm shell-spitting cannons that can be adjusted up and down to train against aircraft of varying height. The aim here is to destroy each enemy before it has a chance to rain fire down upon one of your ships, and care must be taken not to run out of ammo just as an enemy plane attacks. Occasional surveillance planes will wander harmlessly across the screen and these can also be shot down for a points bonus. Once a certain number of enemy aircraft have been destroyed – thirty if you attacked directly, just ten if you took the hidden passage –

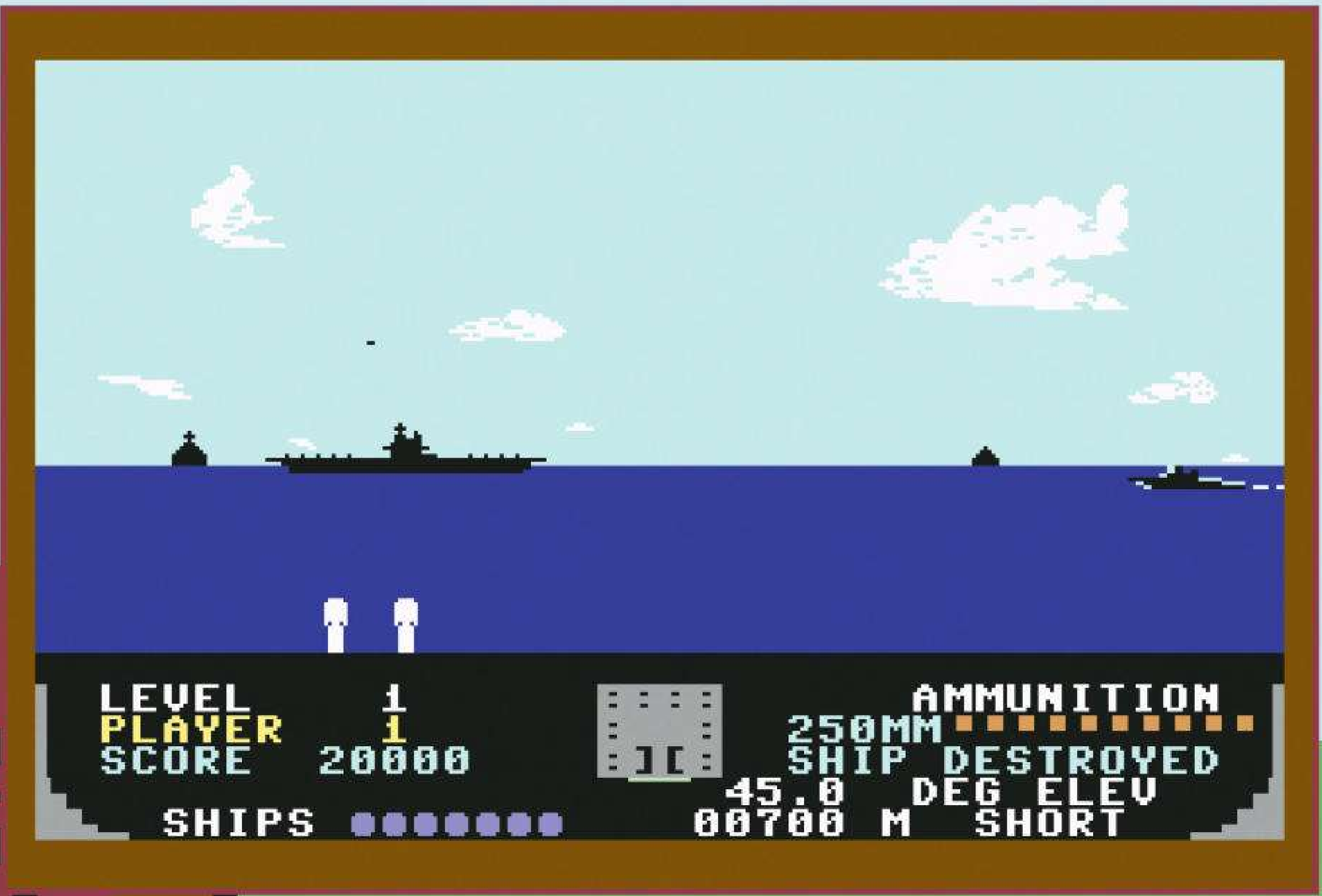


» [C64] Things are hotting up as the enemy air force attacks.

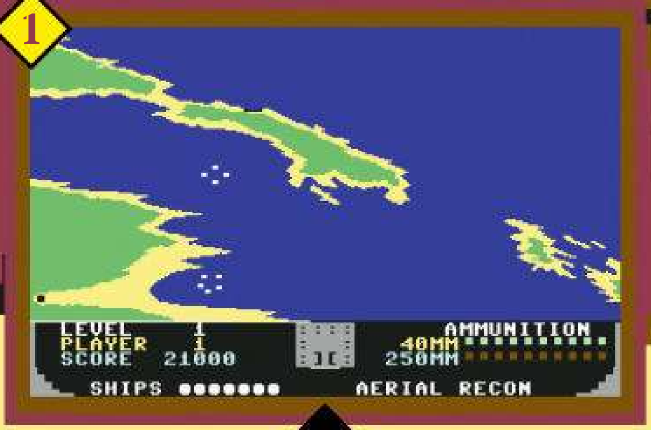


» [C64] All of the Kuhn-Lin's weak points must be hit in order to destroy it.

» [C64] The enemy aircraft carrier is escaping – can you sink it before it steams off-screen?

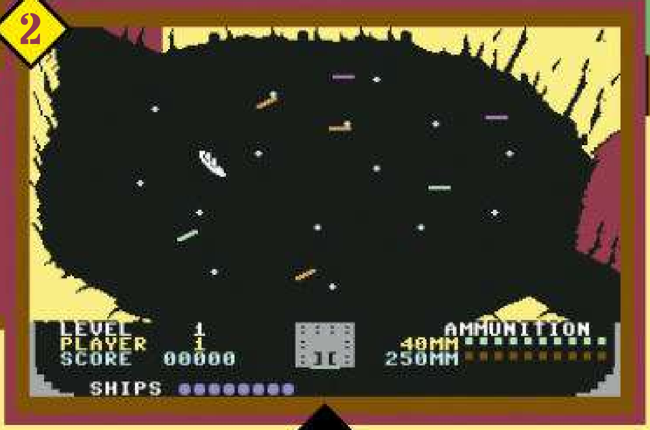

LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 20000
SHIPS
AMMUNITION
250MM
SHIP DESTROYED
45.0 DEG ELEV
00700 M SHORT

1


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 21000
SHIPS
AMMUNITION
40MM
250MM
AERIAL RECON

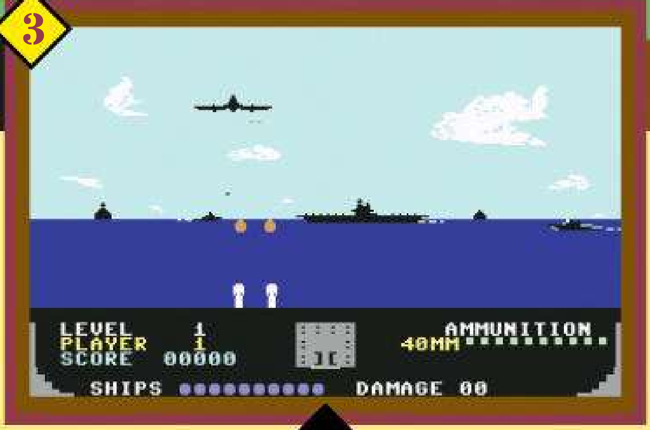
AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE

2


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 00000
SHIPS
AMMUNITION
40MM
250MM

THE HIDDEN PASSAGE

3

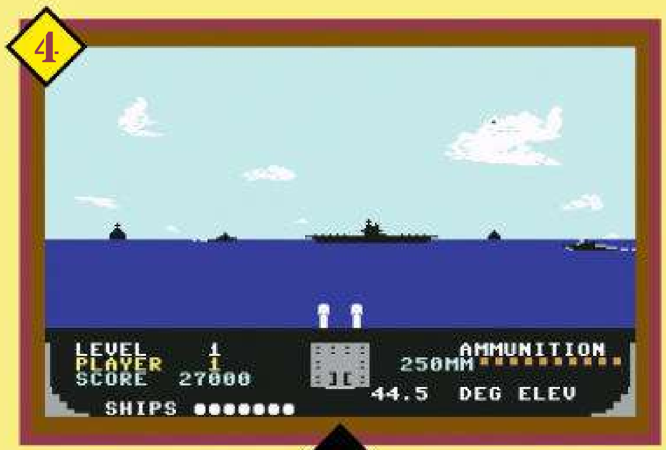

LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 00000
SHIPS
AMMUNITION
40MM
DAMAGE 00

GENERAL QUARTERS

THE BATTLE AHEAD

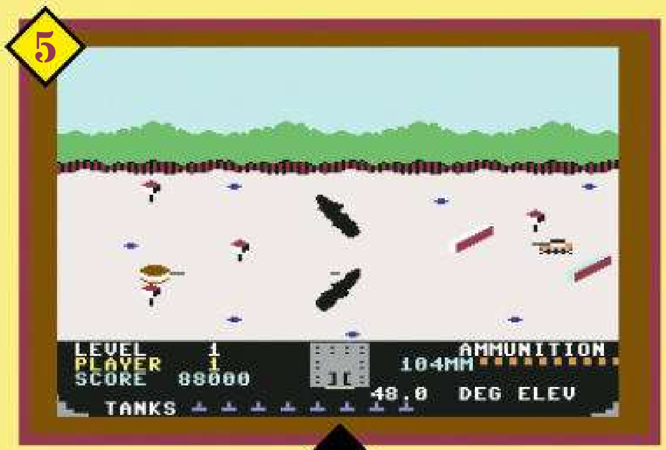
THE SIX DISTINCT STAGES OF BEACH-HEAD

4


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 27000
SHIPS
AMMUNITION
250MM
44.5 DEG ELEV

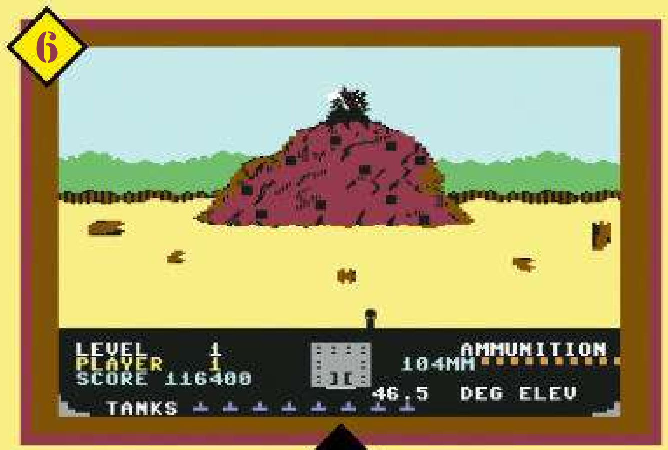
BATTLE STATIONS

5


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 88000
TANKS
AMMUNITION
104MM
48.0 DEG ELEV

BEACH-HEAD!

6

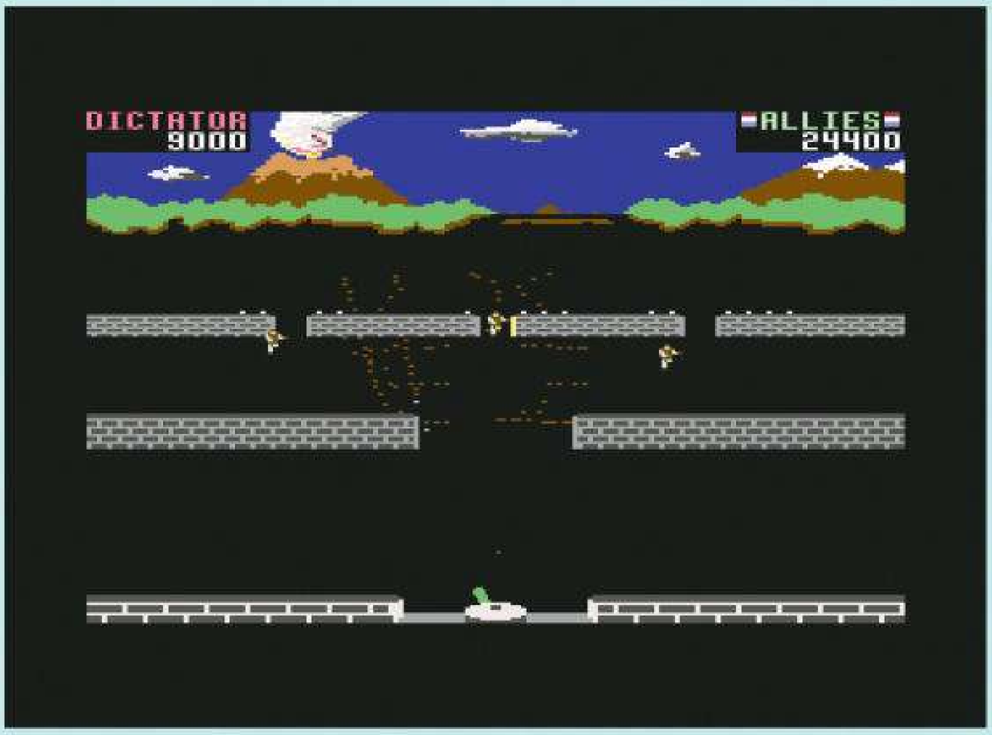

LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 116400
TANKS
AMMUNITION
104MM
46.5 DEG ELEV

THE FINAL BATTLE!

ENEMY PLANE

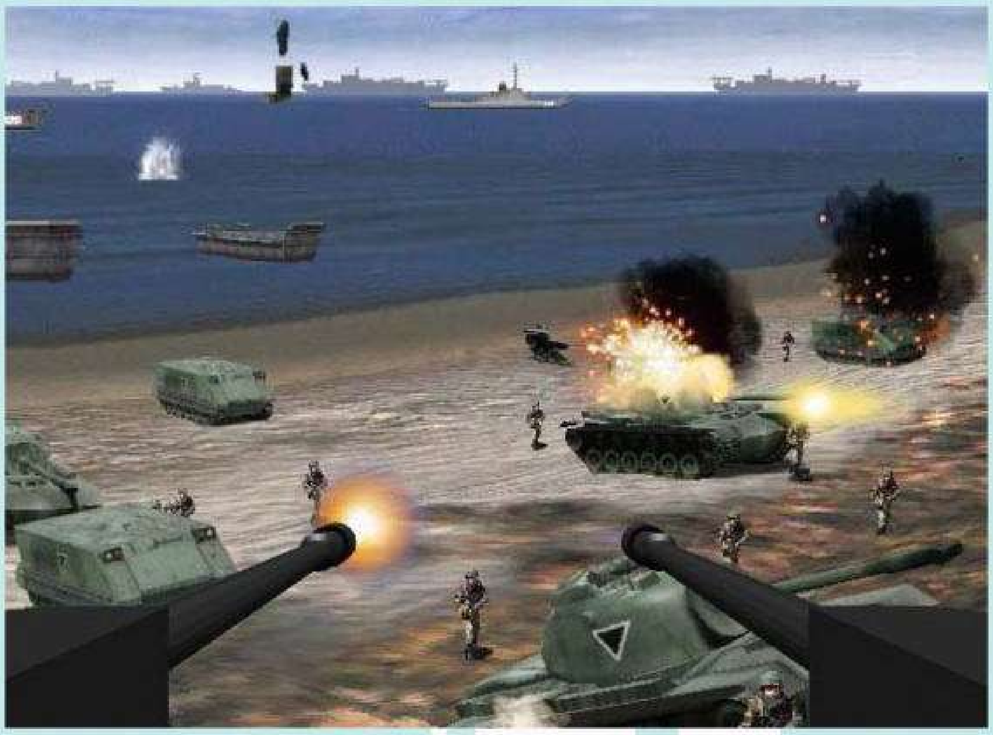
BACK TO THE BEACH

THE SUCCESS OF BEACH-HEAD MADE SEQUELS INEVITABLE – HOW DO THEY COMPARE TO THE ORIGINAL BATTLE?



BEACH-HEAD II: THE DICTATOR STRIKES BACK

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Flushed with the success of *Beach-Head*, Bruce Carver and his brother Roger created this follow-up two years later and used the same template to construct their sequel. Historical context is lent to the first game, placing it in World War II and this game in 1947, and now players could take on either the allies or dictator in another range of varied scenarios. Graphically superior and boasting great sound on the Commodore 64, *Beach-Head II* scored an impressive 90% in issue four of *Zzap! 64*.



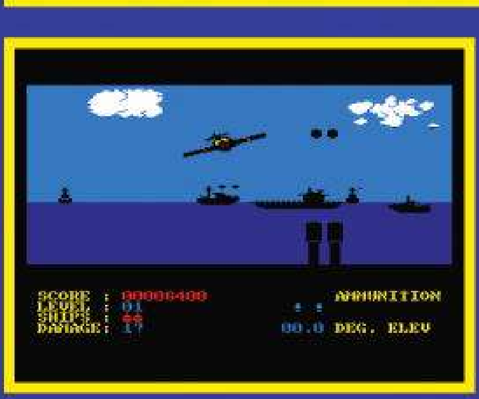
BEACH-HEAD 2000

Fans of the series had to wait another 15 years to get the next *Beach-Head* game and they were to be generally disappointed. Despite the improved visuals, *Beach-Head 2000*'s gameplay is surprisingly inferior to the 1983 classic with just one screen and little variation on offer. The trackball-controlled arcade machine is fun for a short while, but even that soon wears thin. Further games, such as *Beach-Head 2002*, appeared, but they suffer from the same issue – gameplay, and gaming, had moved on in the intervening years.

ENEMY SHIP

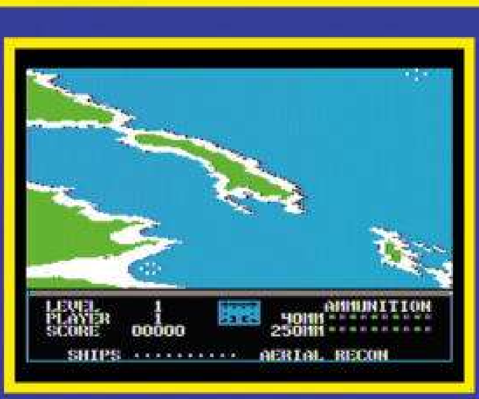
CONVERSION CAPERS

BEACH-HEAD WENT TO WAR ON MANY SYSTEMS, BUT WHICH WAS BEST?



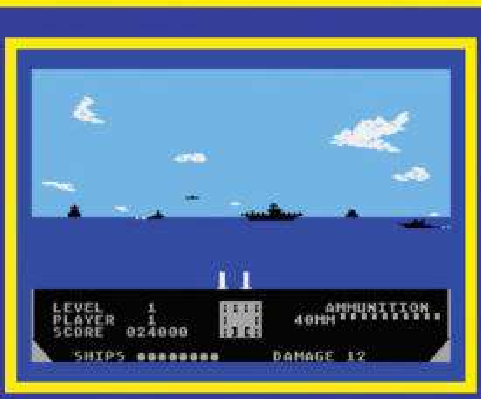
AMSTRAD CPC

The graphical fidelity in this version is rather impressive and the extra detail to the enemy aircraft is particularly pleasing to the eye. The hidden passage is a considerably tougher route on Amstrad's computer thanks to the player's large ship and some incredibly fast torpedoes, and while it all feels a little cramped compared to the Commodore 64 original, there's plenty of war-mongering fun to be had here despite some choppy scrolling in the tank level. Considering the quality of many Amstrad conversions, this is very decent indeed.



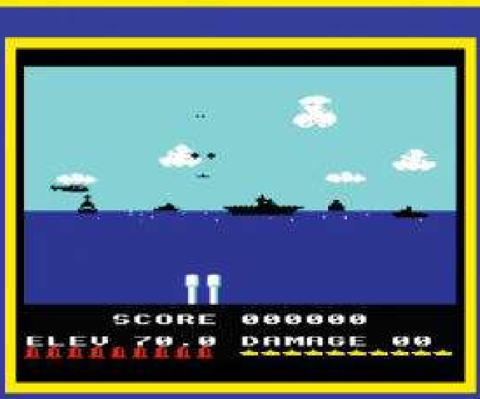
APPLE II

Beach-Head on the Apple computer is a curious affair, lacking some of the original's gritty feel yet including a few extra flourishes that can't fail to endear. First of all, the game includes some fantastic explosions, with coloured pixels flying all over the screen whenever an enemy is destroyed. And the final tank section has your tank equipped with an unlikely rapid fire, the shots rebounding off rocks and taking out the many enemies. Tough, even on easy mode, this is a slightly different way to experience war, *Beach-Head* style.



ATARI 8-BIT

Coded alongside the Commodore 64 game at Access Software, the Atari 8-bit computer impressively keeps much of the action the same, such as the lovely flashing screen that appears every time the player loses one of their precious ships. It's a fair bit trickier to play on this version too, with the tank section including some desperately narrow gaps to breach that can make it quite tricky. Even with this tougher difficulty level it is still a fantastic game and huge fun, so it comes highly recommended for owners of the system.

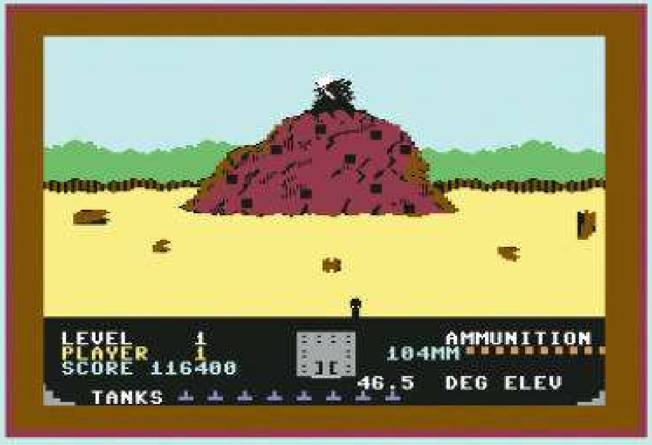


BBC MICRO/ELECTRON

This version of the hit game was coded by Peter Johnson. The recon map feels a little more genuine here, and it is presented as a more traditional top-down view. There are some rather nice embellishments in the main game too. The bombs and missiles hit home with an extremely satisfying crunch and the BBC Micro conjures up a lovely twinkling seascape with the mines in the hidden passage realistically bobbing up and down. A very nice conversion and as you'd expect the Electron version isn't quite as impressive, but it's still fun.

ENEMY PLANE
ESCAPING

RECON
PLANE


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 116400
AMMUNITION
104MM
46.5 DEG ELEV
TANKS

» [C64] Mission accomplished

▶ the aerial attack ceases and you progress to the next stage of the battle.

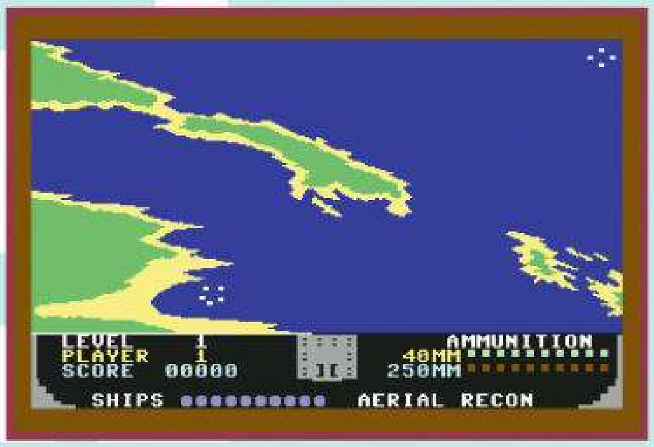
Since its invention early in the 20th century, the aircraft carrier has played a key part in several conflicts. Often the capital ship of a fleet, in *Beach-Head* it is the focus of the ensuing battle, the enemy carrier steadily steaming towards safety as the player frantically attempts to sink it in order to register a significant and morale-boosting bonus of 10,000 points. The 250mm cannons have a degree angle added to the display with 0.5% degree equal to 100 metres in range, either closer or further away. Tactics once more come into play: do you attempt to destroy the carrier and secure that bonus or try and eliminate some of those other enemy ships that are inconsiderately firing back at you? With each enemy vessel positioned at a distinctive distance from the player, choosing which target to attack and when is crucial as each successful hit by the enemy reduces the player's fleet, again affecting the final two stages of *Beach-Head*.

The opponent fleet destroyed, there's one final visit to the map view – it's finally time to land on the titular sandy banks of the dictator's island. Inside each of your ships nestles a pair of tanks, now deposited on the beach, and ready for action. The final obstacle to Kuhn-Lin awaits you – deadly sands containing obstructions, mines, opponent tanks and more.

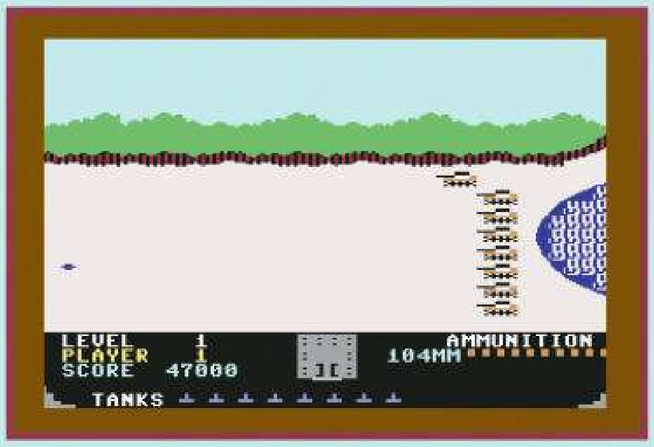
Once a tank begins its perilous journey, there's no turning back as the screen relentlessly scrolls towards the enemy base. Fortunately these are nimble weapons of war, able to dodge impediments while letting loose cannon fire upon the enemy. A slight bridge, narrow gully and a complex maze of barricades await you, often bolstered by an enemy position or vehicle. Successfully wind your way through all of these and it's time to have a crack at the big one, Kuhn-Lin itself.

The Kuhn-Lin mountain gun, so evocatively represented on *Beach-Head*'s cover, now ▶

"I AM PARTICULARLY PROUD OF THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER SECTION BECAUSE IT REALLY LOOKS CONVINCINGLY 3D"
DAVID J ANDERSON

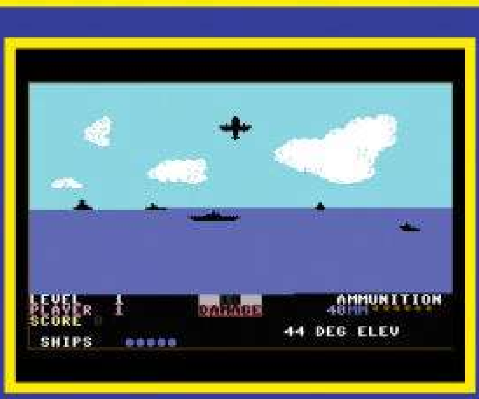

LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 00000
AMMUNITION
40MM
250MM
SHIPS
AERIAL RECON

» [C64] The choice ahead: a sneak attack or direct assault?


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE 47000
AMMUNITION
104MM
TANKS

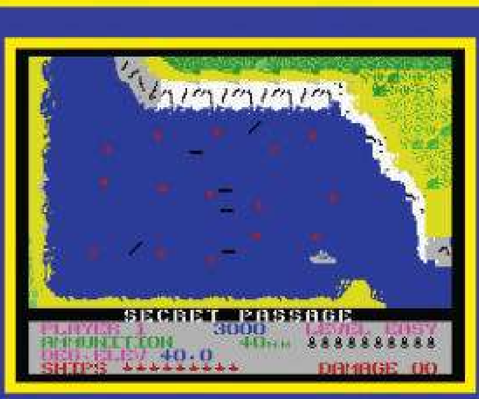
» [C64] The more ships you successfully guide to the beachhead the more tanks you'll have at your command for the final assault.

AIRCRAFT
CARRIER


LEVEL 1
PLAYER 1
SCORE
DAMAGE
AMMUNITION
40MM
44 DEG ELEV
SHIPS

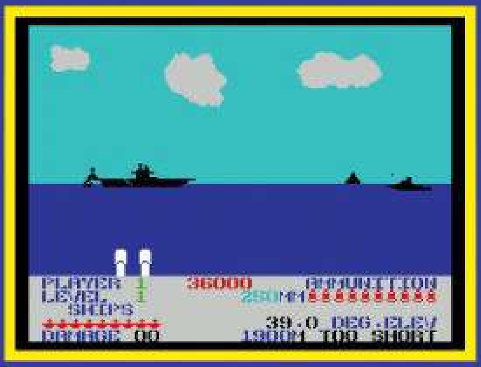
COMMODORE 16/PLUS 4

Developed by Anirog Software, this is probably the weakest version of *Beach-Head*, sadly cut down considerably in order to squeeze into the Commodore 16. As the recon screen is now completely absent, all of the tactical nous of the game disappears with it, which is rather disappointing. Unfortunately this means that there's very little of the classic game to actually play. Despite an admittedly fair amount of routine shooting fun for fans, albeit little else. It's understandable considering the restrictions of the hardware, but still a shame.


SECRET PASSAGE
PLAYER 1
3000
LEVEL EASY
AMMUNITION
40MM
DEG.ELEV 40.0
SHIPS
DAMAGE 00

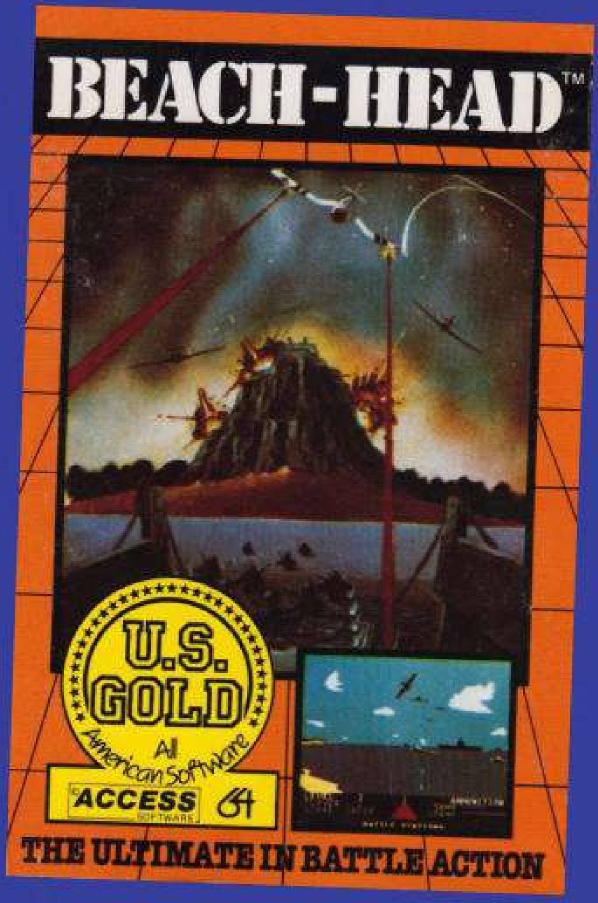
MSX

Development duties for the MSX conversion of *Beach-Head* were farmed out to Orpheus by Access and the developer produced a surprisingly decent conversion of the hit game. The chief graphical difference is on the tank stage which has many more colourful enemies and a strict side-on view. Otherwise, Orpheus created a great arcade action game for MSX owners that comes highly recommended to owners of the machine. Interestingly, the hidden passage is renamed the secret passage in this version. It otherwise plays the same.


PLAYER 1
LEVEL 1
SHIPS
36000
AMMUNITION
250MM
39.0 DEG.ELEV
DAMAGE 00
1800M TOO SHORT

ZX SPECTRUM

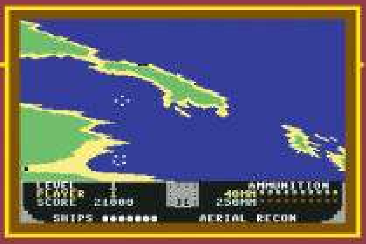
David J Anderson's distinctive style is established here with a comprehensive menu and the ability for the player to enter their name before play starts. While easy mode is a little too, well, easy, attempting the hard level is a serious challenge, with the torpedoes of the hidden passage speeding across the narrow channel at an alarming rate. The only real criticism we have of this version is that it's sadly almost completely silent save for the odd effect. That does little to quell the excellent gameplay mechanics, though and you'll have a lot of fun with it.


BEACH-HEAD™
U.S. GOLD
All American Software
ACCESS SOFTWARE
64
THE ULTIMATE IN BATTLE ACTION

BLAZING A TRAIL

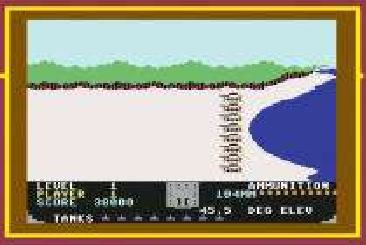
HOW BEACH-HEAD FORGED NEW GROUND

TACTICAL CHOICE



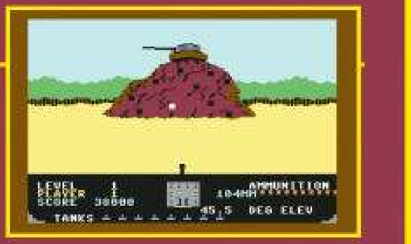
The tactical choice at the beginning of *Beach-Head* was unprecedented in the arcade action genre in 1983. Taking the hidden passage route can be perilous (especially on the harder settings) – do you risk losing ships in order to surprise the enemy?

GRAVE IMPLICATIONS



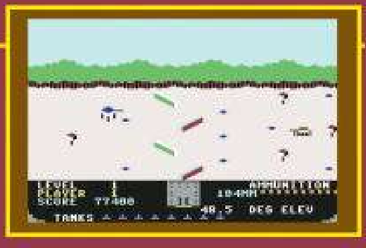
It's not just a life gone when one of your ships is destroyed. Each vessel contains two tanks huddled within its bowels. Lose too many and your ability to destroy the final target, Kuhn-Lin, is severely hampered.

PAWN SACRIFICE

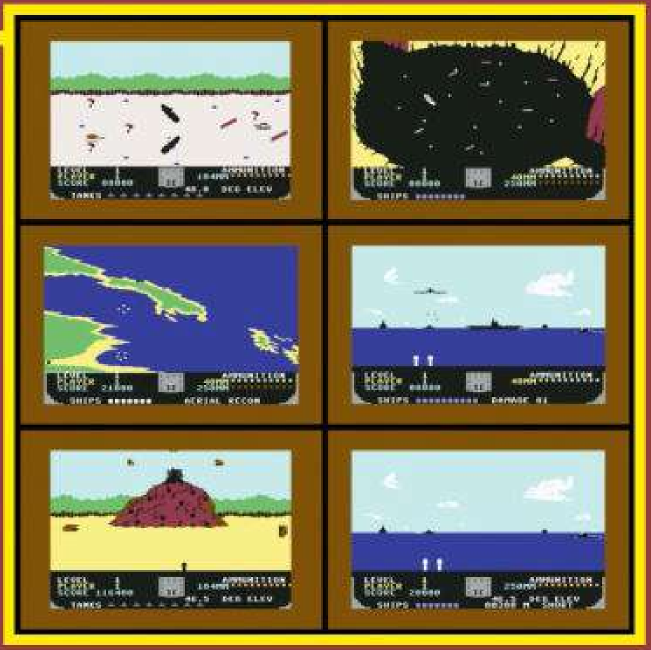


No matter how good your shooting skills are, you're not going to beat Kuhn-Lin with one tank. Rotating quickly, the massive gun will always obliterate the first tank before you've had a chance to destroy it. Any volunteers?

LEVELLING-UP



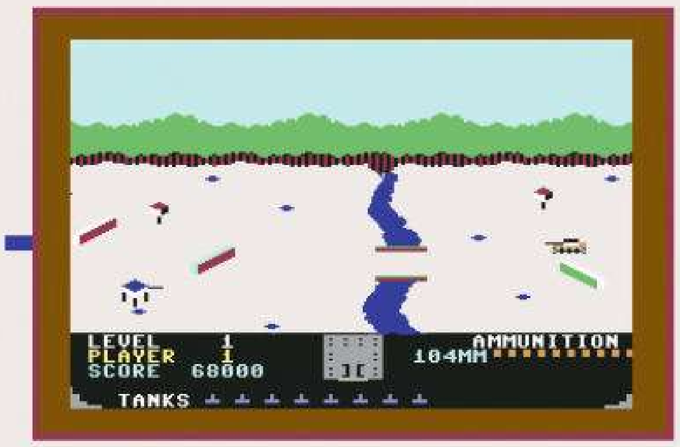
The penultimate section of *Beach-Head* is a precarious trek across the titular beach. Each subsequent tank encounters more resistance as the enemy realises the danger that the assault is posing.



GENRE VARIETY

Not only does *Beach-Head* offer several different stages – they are also vastly different. There's an overhead tactical view, a tense dart through the hidden passage, two different types of sea battle, a scrolling tank level and the final showdown. Lots of boom for your buck.

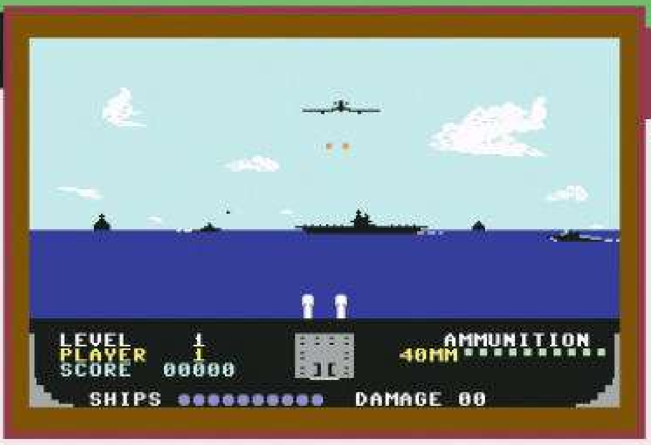
appears, the golden beach belying the danger that awaits. Alert to your presence, the gun is swiftly rotated towards your lone tank, ready to unleash its deadly volley of fire. But like the very best of so-called impregnable fortresses, Kuhn-Lin has a weakness. Several vulnerable points are dotted around its craggy rocks and each must be targeted in turn as they turn white. When all ten have been struck, the gun explodes and a white flag flutters apologetically from the rubble. Mission complete, it's time to take to the seas once more and do it all over again in the name of high scores.



» [C64] Each subsequent attack on Kuhn-Lin strengthens the enemy's resolve.

Points in *Beach-Head* are accrued on a risk-reward basis and depend on your tactical choices. Willing to pick your way through the hidden passage? Then each ship you safely guide through will net you 3,000 points, while going the direct way means a potential 8,000 more points for shooting down the extra aircraft that line up against your guns, as well as more time to level your sights against the unarmed reconnaissance planes. Each ship sunk in the sea battle registers 2,000 points with the aforementioned bonus of 10,000 for scuttling the enemy's aircraft carrier. Finally, destroying tanks, bunkers, towers and machine guns on the beach scores 1,000, 800, 600 and 400 points respectively and there's a performance-review style bonus of 2,000 points per spare vessel once Kuhn-Lin is blown up, an act which naturally secures the highest points award, 20,000.

Originally released on the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit computers, *Beach-Head* quickly became a smash hit in America. This was no surprise given the epic feel to its gameplay; player's really felt for the first time that they were taking part in a heroic battle, commanding a legion of valiant soldiers against an unnamed menace. Perhaps more surprising was *Beach-Head*'s longevity. Inspired by its variation of gameplay, Access' game showed how much more the Commodore 64 and its peers could offer beyond the arcade clones and one-screen games that were common at the time. In 1984 and 1985, British publisher US Gold, keen to offer stateside products to software-hungry audiences in the UK, licensed *Beach-Head* and released it onto further platforms including the BBC Micro and ZX Spectrum. Requiring brains, brawn and nimble fingers, even two years later, few games matched its enduring power, ensuring it became Access' biggest selling release by a long distance, and proving that while war may well be hell, it's seldom as much fun as it is in *Beach-Head*. See you on the beach! ✱



» [C64] Fire rains down on your fleet.

A CHAT WITH DAVID J ANDERSON

HOW TAPPER'S SPECTRUM CODER WENT TO WAR

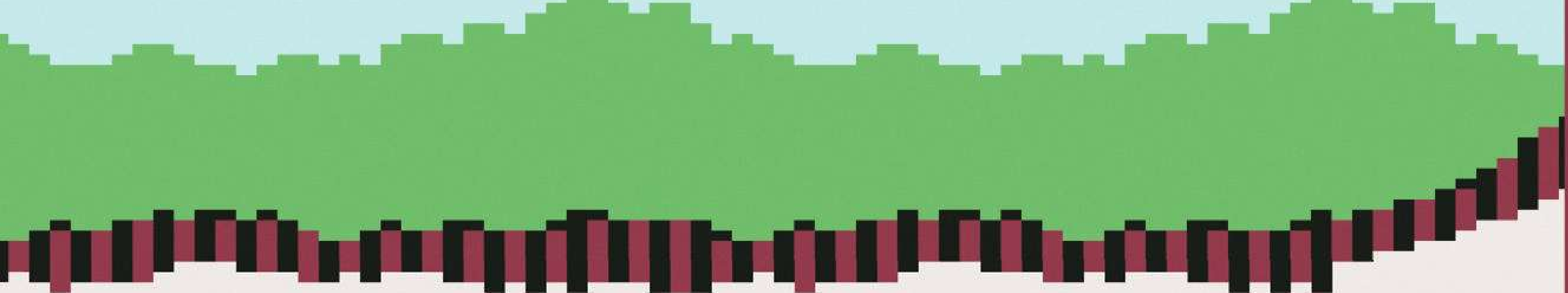
How did you come to work on *Beach-Head*?
Beach-Head was the launch title for the US Gold joint venture. We (Platinum Productions) had approached Ocean to demo our Spectrum homage to the arcade game *Robotron: 2084* and the development team at Ocean were blown away. Ocean didn't have a licence for the game and it was too close of a copy for them to risk selling it. Instead they showed us *Beach-Head* on the C64 and revealed their plans to launch US Gold that autumn (1984). The leadership team at Ocean, Jon Woods and David Ward, asked us, "Do you think you can do it for the Spectrum?", and we were confident we could. It was only later we learned that several other well-known developers had turned it down and Ocean had been advised that it wasn't possible on a machine as basic as the Spectrum. We went home from Manchester with a C64 under our arms and got to work.

What did you think of the original?
Very different, very original and it told a story. It changed my perception of what an arcade game could be. It was certainly not a concept I could ever have developed.

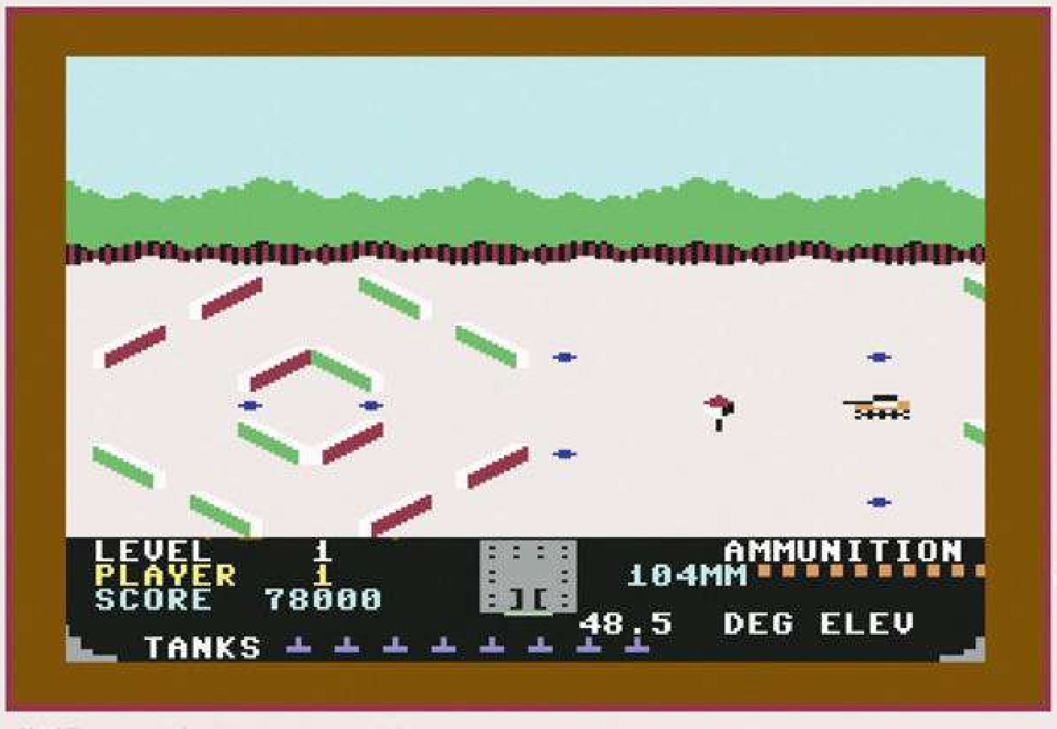
Is there anything you feel you could have added to the Spectrum version or done differently?
I think we made all the right engineering and architectural choices for that game. Actually, it's really all fake – it isn't 3D at all – that was the secret of making it work. We simply mapped all the screen locations and graphics sizes accordingly and the game mostly uses tables of coordinates and graphic pointers to find the sprites to display. The secret of the game's success is that we cheated to enable it to work on the Spectrum. I am particularly proud of the aircraft carrier section because it really looks convincingly 3D. I am proud of the engineering cheats we used to fake that and make it look so convincing.

Do you think the game was perhaps too easy?
It was certainly designed so that people could finish it and have that joy and exhilaration from seeing the final screen. The challenge for me was always to produce a game that worked as authentically as possible – the programming and engineering challenge. I never thought too much about the gameplay.

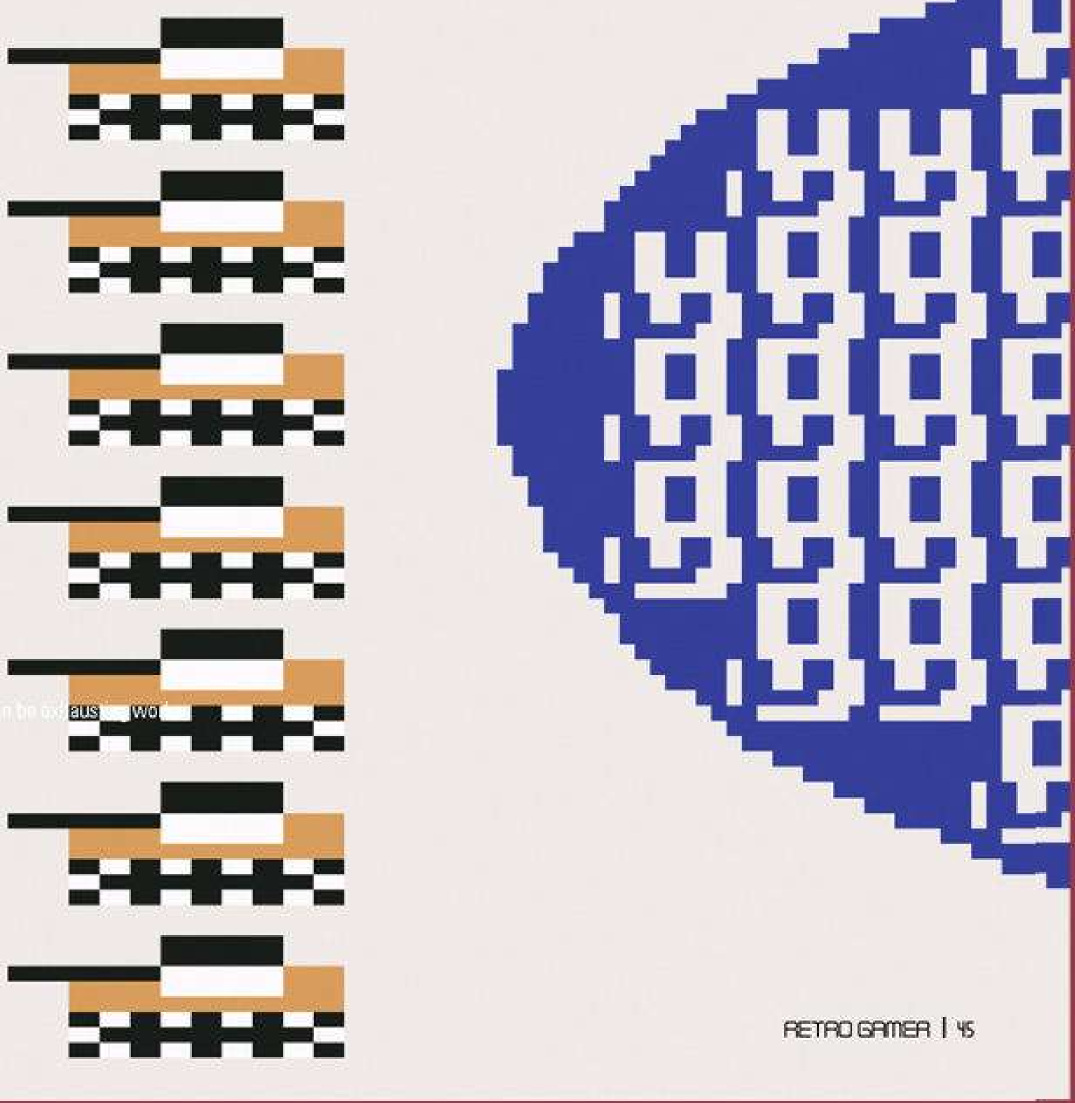
How important was *Beach-Head* to you and your company at the time?
Beach-Head was career defining. It was high profile as the launch title for US Gold. And it made our reputation as the team that could do the impossible with the ZX Spectrum – consequently, our reward for good work was to be offered a lot more challenges. We became US Gold's 'go-to' guys for titles others said couldn't be done. They had a long list of titles they'd licensed. We had mixed success – replicating arcade games on the Speccy was always going to be difficult, and always filled with compromises. It was never completely satisfying.



> "WE BECAME US GOLD'S 'GO-TO' GUYS FOR TITLES OTHERS SAID COULDN'T BE DONE"
> **DAVID J ANDERSON**



» [C64] The enemy isn't going to just let you walk in.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

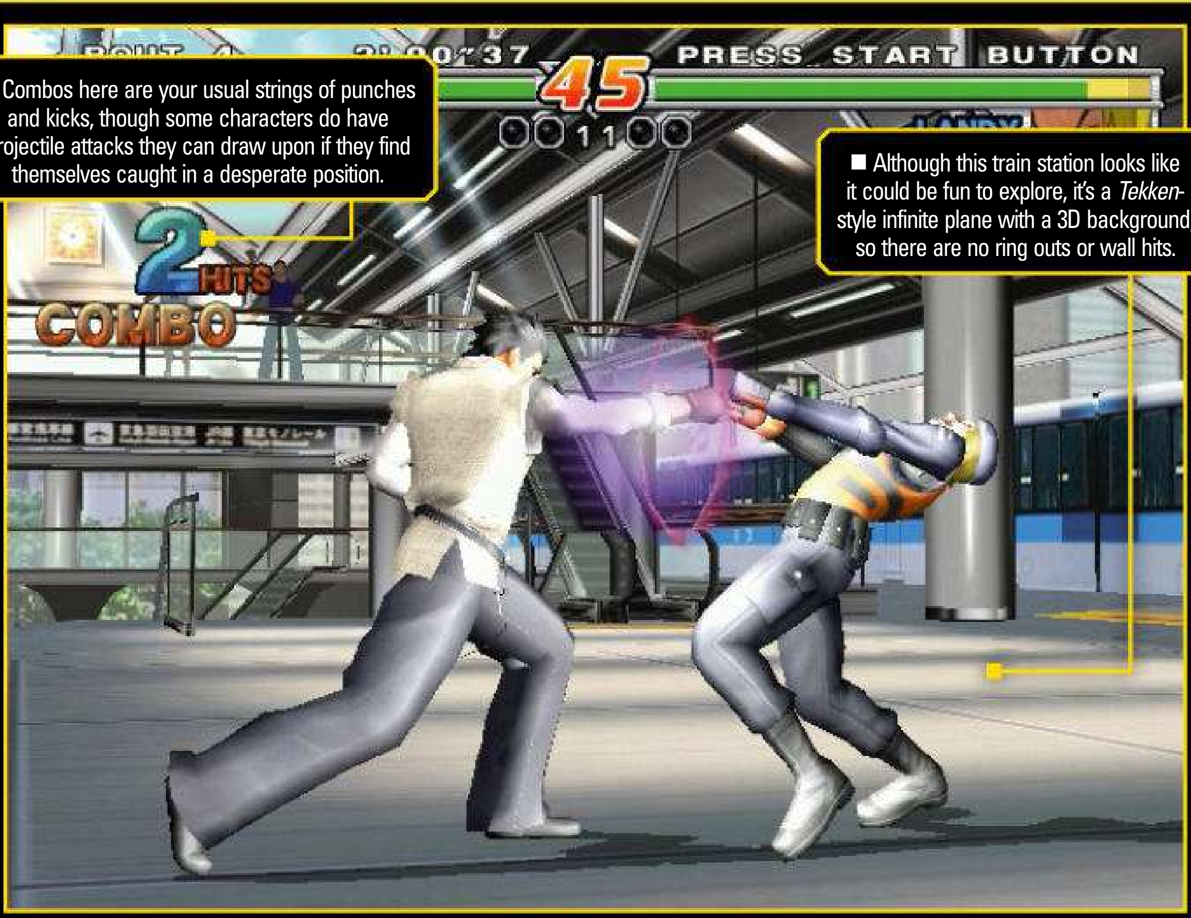
JINGI STORM

DEVELOPER: **ATRATIVA** YEAR: **2006** GENRE: **FIGHTING**

■ **Every so often you can come across a weird little slice of arcade history, and *Jingi Storm* is definitely one of them.** Originally announced as *Force Five* and developed by Anchor Inc, the game was set to release on Sammy's Dreamcast-based Atomiswave arcade board in 2004. However, this never came to pass and the assets were sold on to the virtually unknown company Atrativa, which revamped and renamed the game and switched it to Sega's Naomi board. All the women were removed from the main roster of characters and turned into mid-bosses, and all of the fighters gained female companions who would appear in various states of undress based on the player's margin of victory. However, this aspect of the game was scrapped after the original location test and the companions eventually existed solely to deliver post-match quotes, fully clothed.

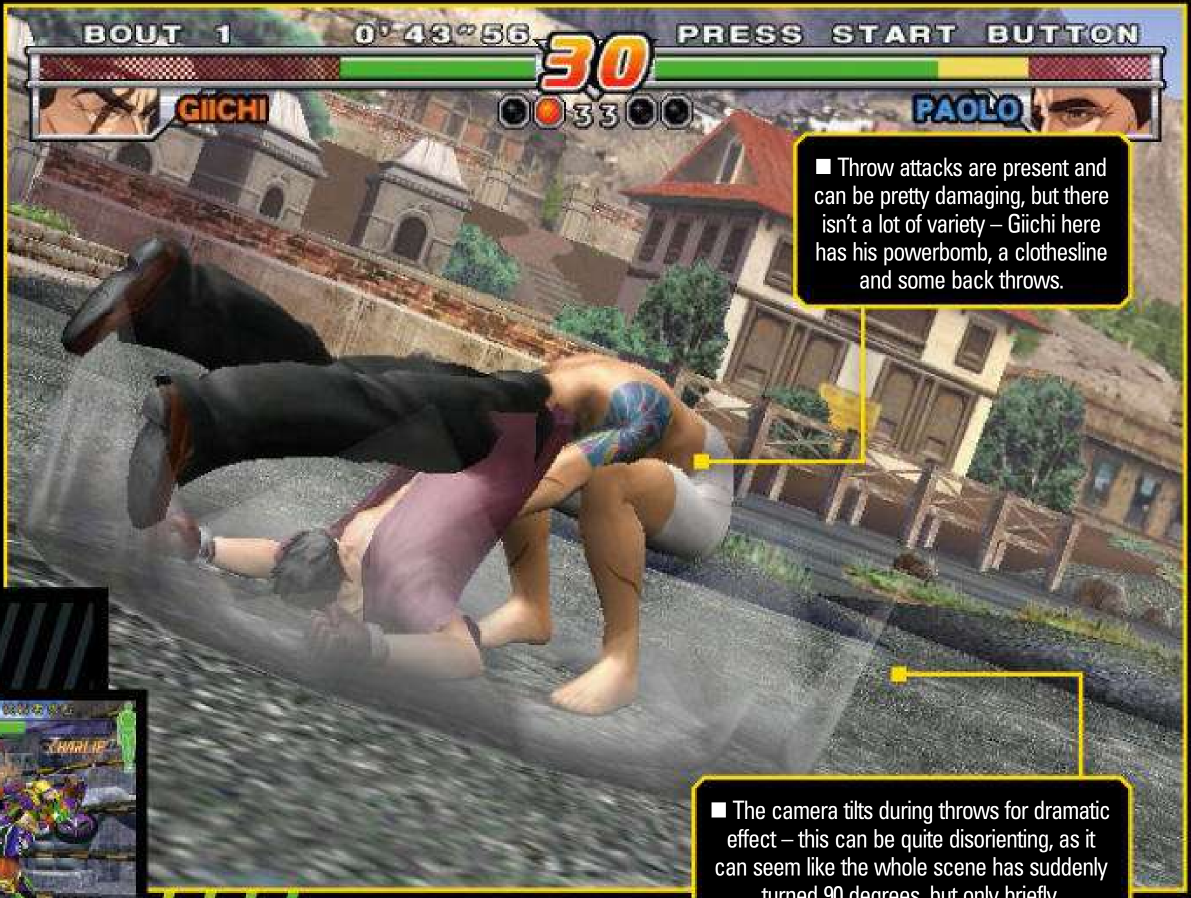
All of that attempted focus on titillation was likely an attempt to disguise the fact that *Jingi Storm* is only an average fighting game. The game uses the same three-button control system as *Virtua Fighter*, and you can dodge from side to side. However, the fast action and easy move strings can't cover up the fact that there's a distinct lack of depth to the fighting, with the game really offering no unique ideas or twists on the genre. The only thing of note is that you can choose the first mid-boss you face, before going on to predictably overpowered final enemies. The sound is nothing to write home about, and the visuals look a little on the plain side next to Dreamcast fighting games like *Soulcalibur* and *Dead Or Alive 2*. Bear in mind that those games were both over five years old at the time – *Jingi Storm* would have been in arcades next to the likes of *Tekken 5* and *Virtua Fighter 5*.

Jingi Storm never made it out of Japan, and would probably have struggled to find an audience on home consoles. The game was just much too far behind the competition, and unlike the companion characters in the game, that couldn't be covered up.



■ Combos here are your usual strings of punches and kicks, though some characters do have projectile attacks they can draw upon if they find themselves caught in a desperate position.

■ Although this train station looks like it could be fun to explore, it's a *Tekken*-style infinite plane with a 3D background, so there are no ring outs or wall hits.



■ Throw attacks are present and can be pretty damaging, but there isn't a lot of variety – Giichi here has his powerbomb, a clothesline and some back throws.

■ The camera tilts during throws for dramatic effect – this can be quite disorienting, as it can seem like the whole scene has suddenly turned 90 degrees, but only briefly.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

FIGHTING VIPERS 2

1998

■ If you're truly looking for an alternative fighting game of this generation, *Fighting Vipers 2* at least has something unique going for it – the Super KO moves that win whole fights, not just single rounds, if they land. The Dreamcast conversion is available in Japan and Europe only.

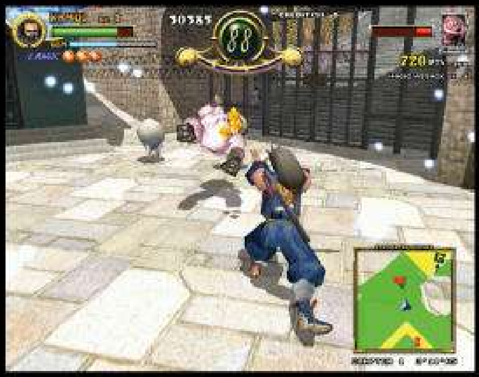
23
TOKIO
CHARLIE
STAGE 1

SLASHOUT

DEVELOPER: **SEGA** YEAR: **2000** GENRE: **BEAT-'EM-UP**

■ ***Spikeout* was a novel attempt to bring the humble beat-'em-up into 3D properly, with wide open fighting areas as well as linked cabinets that allowed each player to explore them without restriction.** In moving from Model 3 to Naomi, Sega decided to do a semi-sequel – *Slashout* retained the game design and mechanics of *Spikeout*, but with a brand-new fantasy theme. You now have a group of sword-wielding characters, odd animal enemies and gems that will periodically refill and extend your life bar.

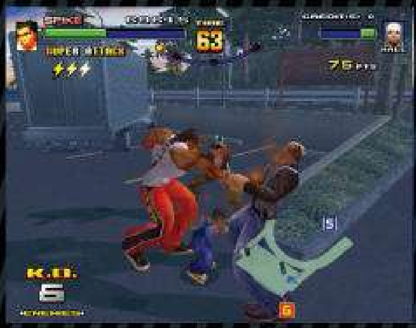
The most interesting aspect of the game's mechanics is its magic attacks – hold down the button and you'll charge for an attack that knocks enemies up into the air or backwards into their buddies. Unfortunately, successfully pulling these crucial attacks off is a nightmare because taking a hit will interrupt the move, and the difficulty is cranked right up from the very start of the game. This is a shame, because in most respects *Slashout* is a winner. If we could take a guess as to why this didn't get the seemingly obvious Dreamcast port, we'd imagine it was down to the difficulties of making multiplayer work online.


» [Arcade] This attack is tricky to pull off, but crucial if you can regularly make it stick.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SPIKEOUT

1998



■ While it isn't quite a straight up conversion, the stages and mechanics in *Spikeout: Battle Street* for the Xbox are the same ones found in the arcade game. The characters aren't quite the same, and the story stuff is all new, but the Battle Street mode is essentially an arcade mode.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ORDYNE

1988

■ This horizontally scrolling cute-'em-up is also by Namco, and is quite a bit better than *Pistol Daimyo*'s game. The PC Engine version is quite good and earned a North American Turbografx 16 release, while the arcade version was included on *Namco Museum Volume 4* for PlayStation.

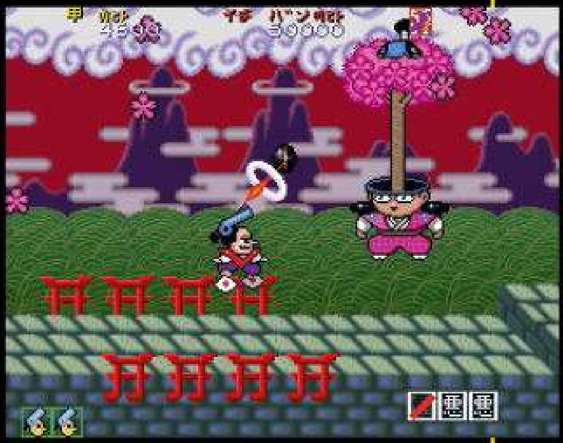
PISTOL DAIMYO NO BOKEN

DEVELOPER: **NAMCO** YEAR: **1990** GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ **Have you ever wanted to play as a Japanese feudal lord with a pistol stuck to his head?** No, we hadn't either, but Namco decided that this boss character from *Bravoman* needed his own spin-off game, roughly titled *Quest Of Pistol Daimyo* in English. He's also not capable of flight on his own, so he uses fans to propel himself into the air – and in gameplay terms, that means he's incapable of maintaining a stable altitude.

You can tap the fire button to shoot regular bullets, or hold it to charge up an arcing, bouncing shot that explodes in a lovely burst of fireworks. None of this particularly matters though, because your weaponry is highly useless and your enemies are just so utterly relentless. There are plenty of hostile types that appear on-screen at all times, and you're expected to deal with their speedy attacks too.

It's far from being the best shooter ever and we can see why it never left Japan. Having said that, there is a certain bizarre appeal to the game thanks to its wacky style, so genre fanatics and lovers of gaming oddities may wish to check it out.


» [Arcade] Shoot the tree, not the face. Yes, the boss has a cherry blossom haircut. No, we don't know why either.

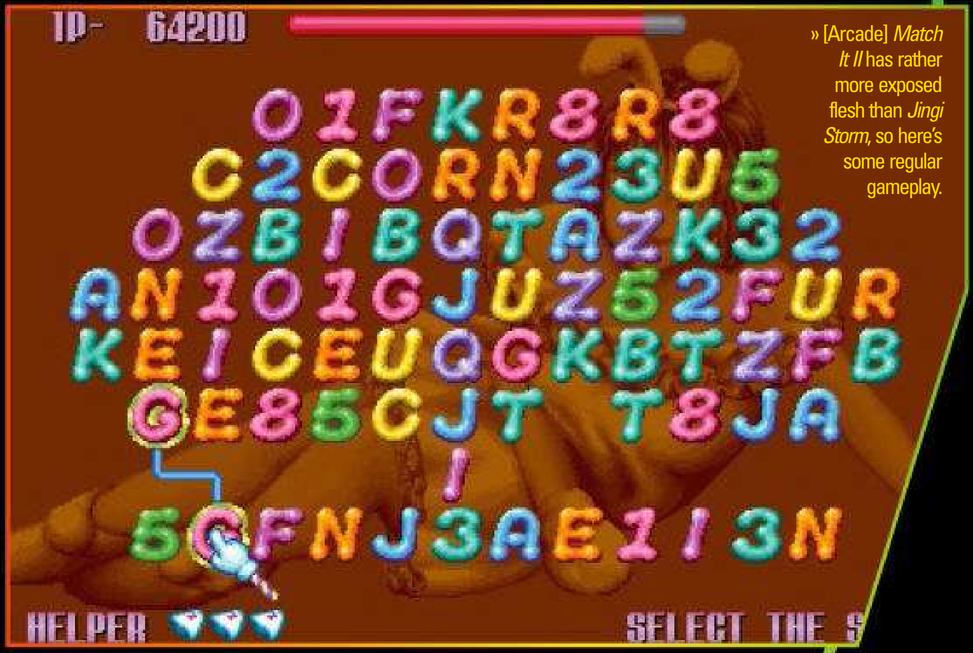
BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

MATCH IT II

DEVELOPER: **TAMTEX** YEAR: **1993** GENRE: **PUZZLE**

■ **Mahjong solitaire games gained quite a bit of popularity through the Eighties and Nineties, and chances are you've played one of them, whether it was a great commercial release like *Shanghai* on the Master System or a public domain game like *Mah Jongg: Dragon Tiles* for the Amiga.** If you have, you'll have a pretty good idea of what's going on in *Match It II* straight away – you've got to match pairs of items according to a certain set of rules, without creating an impossible board state in the process. There's a time limit here that is extended for each successful match, and a limited number of helper moves if you're struggling.

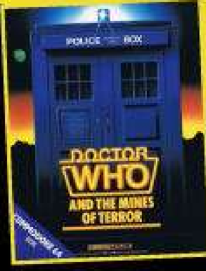
The beginner game has a jewel theme and the expert game uses mahjong tiles, but the real draw of the game is meant to be the normal mode, in which successfully completing a board causes the woman in the background to remove some of her clothing. It's a cheap ploy, and not the kind of thing found on home systems by 1993.



» [Arcade] *Match It II* has rather more exposed flesh than *Jingi Storm*, so here's some regular gameplay.

THE MAKING OF

DOCTOR WHO AND THE MINES OF TERROR



AS THE EDUCATOR'S COMPUTER OF CHOICE, THE BBC MICRO WAS THE PERFECT PLACE FOR A GAME THAT PROMISED 'BRAIN-TO-BRAIN COMBAT'. WE TIME-TRAVEL BACK TO 1985 TO REVEAL THE STORY BEHIND THE DOCTOR'S DESCENT INTO THE MINES OF TERROR

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

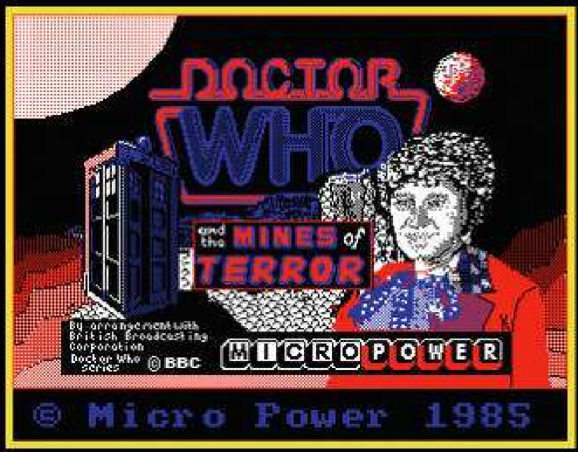
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MICRO POWER
- » **DEVELOPER:** MICRO POWER
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** BBC MICRO, C64, AMSTRAD CPC
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM ADVENTURE

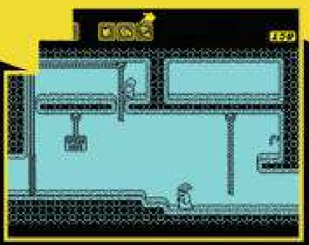
Who's your favourite Doctor Who? Everyone has a preference, and it's not just about the Doctor per se, as the associated storylines, assistants and villains all come into play when people pick their defining era of the long-running BBC TV show.

For many readers it will be the reign of Baker – Tom, not Colin, obviously. We don't imagine the unfortunate sixth Doctor ranks highly on anyone's list. His short tenure was plagued by behind-the-scenes issues that led to the show being put on hiatus for 18 months between March 1985 and September 1986. And it was during this troubled period, when there were genuine concerns that the postponement may become permanent, that Micro Power secured the rights to the show and started to create its most ambitious and costly game to date: *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror.*

» Programmer Gary Partis wrote a number of games for the BBC Micro and later the Acorn Archimedes.


DOCTOR WHO
and the MINES of TERROR
By arrangement with British Broadcasting Corporation Doctor Who series
© BBC
MICROPOWER
© Micro Power 1985
» [BBC Micro] The sixth Doctor's flamboyant clothing was a good match for the BBC Micro's vibrant colour palette.

Micro Power was formed in Leeds in 1980 and made a name for itself producing arcade clones for the BBC Micro. Its focus later turned to original titles with the standout being *Castle Quest*, an acclaimed arcade adventure programmed by Tony Sothcott and released for the Beeb in 1985. The success of the game prompted Micro Power to pursue a sequel, and it enlisted Gary Partis to program the lead BBC Micro version. Gary, who had already written several arcade games, including the space shooter *Positron* for Micro Power, says, "I was asked to write *Castle Quest 2* around spring of 1985. I had just turned 18 and was in the final year of sixth form studying for three A levels. At some point Micro Power was in discussions with the BBC over the possibility of using the Doctor Who name. I was completely oblivious to this until I was told of the new direction for the game. I was just a kid working from home, so maybe Micro Power thought I didn't need to know at the early point in development, until final contracts with the BBC had been signed." When the deal was done,

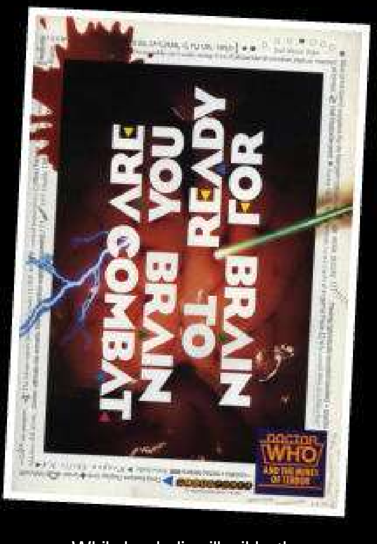


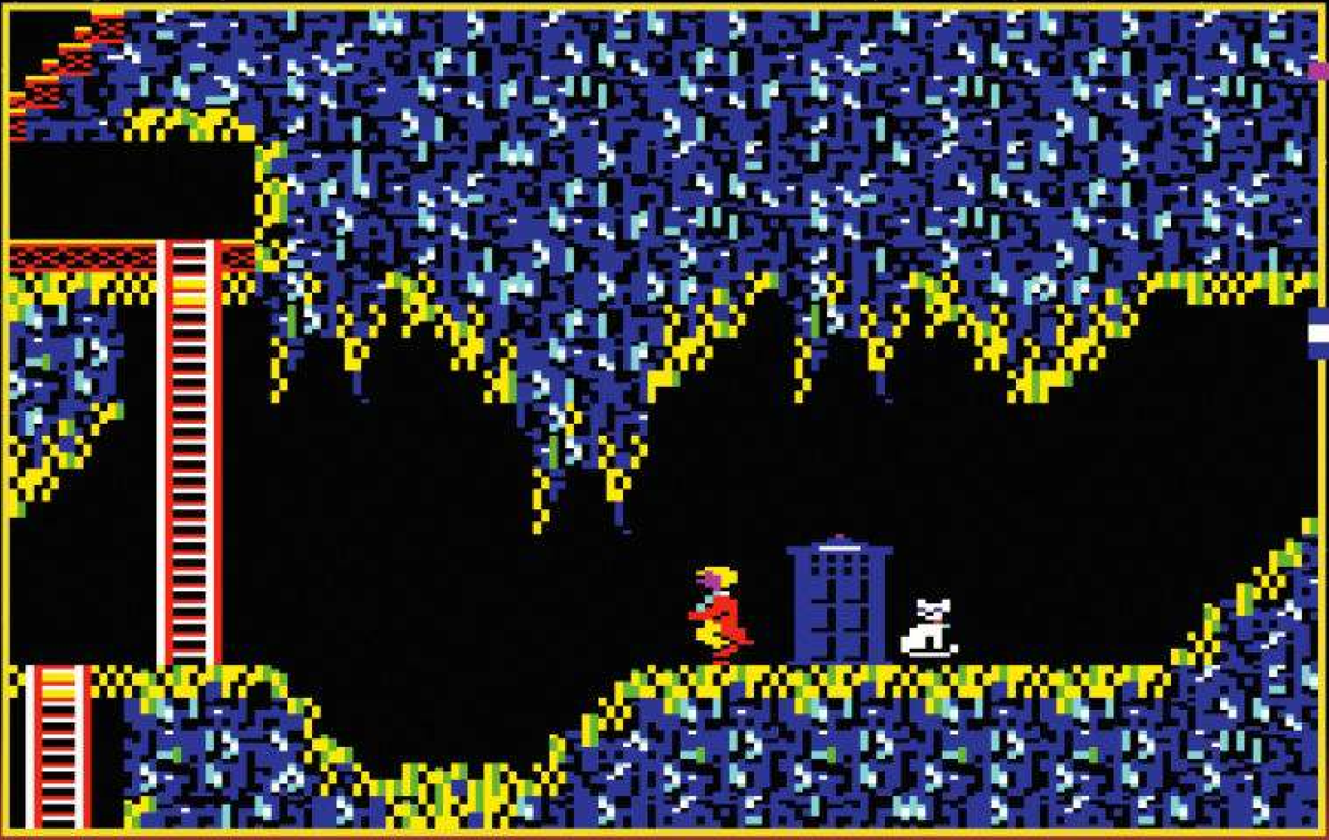
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KILLER GORILLA
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1983

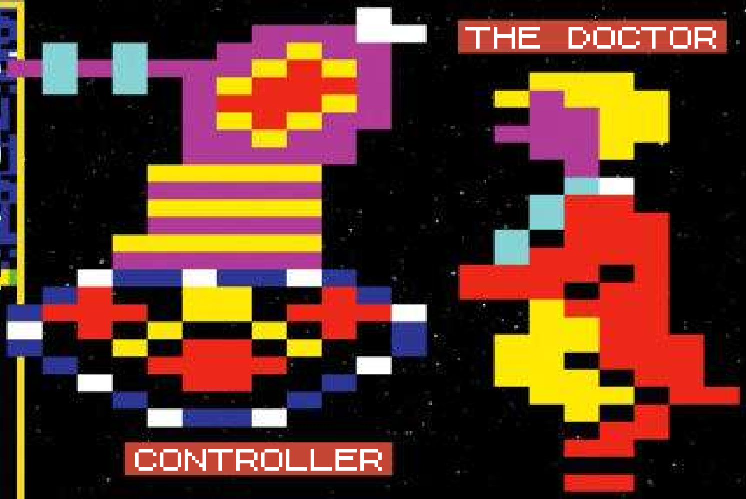
CASTLE QUEST
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1985

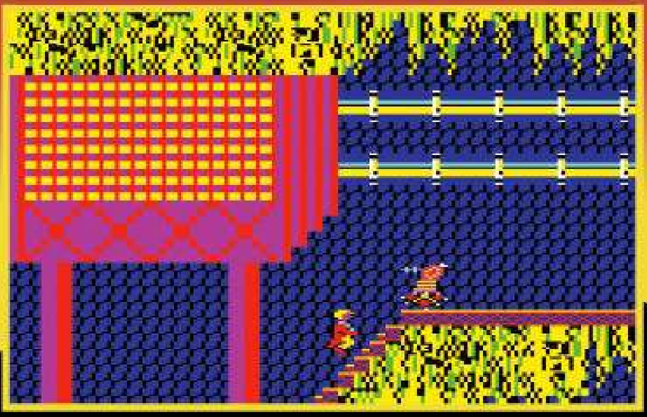
IMOGEN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1986


ARE YOU READY FOR BRAIN TO BRAIN COMBAT
DOCTOR WHO AND THE MINES OF TERROR
» While borderline illegible, the striking advertising artwork certainly caught the attention.

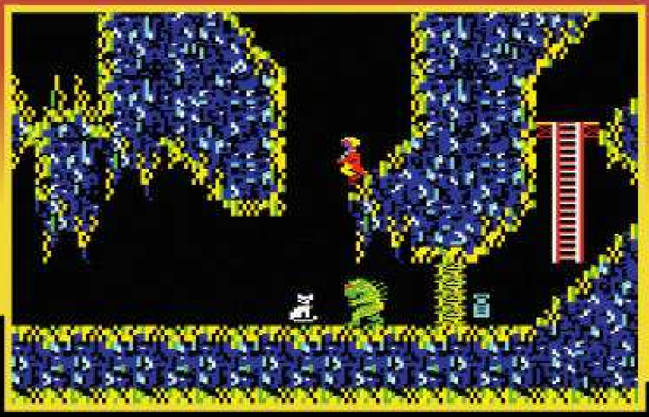


» [BBC Micro] Micro Power originally envisioned the game as a sequel to the excellent *Castle Quest*.





» [BBC Micro] Unlike the Daleks, the Controllers will peruse you down the bloody stairs!



» [BBC Micro] One of the first puzzles involved using Splinx to distract the angry Madrag and sneak into its lair.

Castle Quest 2 regenerated into *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror*. To capitalise on the licence, versions for other computers were prepared. "I was responsible for all the coding on the BBC Micro version," says Gary, "while Tony Sothcott coded the Commodore 64 version. In retrospect, both probably could have been based on the same code base, but in those days, such coding practices in the games arena were not the norm." Versions were also produced for the Amstrad CPC and Sinclair Spectrum.

> "THE CONTROLLERS ARE OBVIOUS COPIES OF DALEKS. I HOWEVER ENSURED MY CONTROLLERS COULD NAVIGATE STAIRS"
> **GARY PARTIS**

Similar to *Castle Quest*, the game was a platformer that utilised full-screen, horizontal and vertical scrolling – something that was "pretty simple" to achieve on the Beeb, according to Gary. "The hardware allowed for changing the start address for the video display, and in BBC Micro Mode 2 [16 colour, 160x256 resolution] the scrolling could be done by two and eight pixels for horizontal and vertical respectively. This explains the four directions of scrolling, and the additional four diagonal directions were just composites of the former four. I recall experimenting with the hardware, attempting to get better, pixel-level scrolling, but not for *Doctor Who*. That was for either *Psycastria* or *Syncron*, a year later in 1986."

While Gary was working through the coding challenges at home in Northumberland, the Micro Power team down in Leeds was busy with the design. As this was a high-profile title for the firm, it was an all-hands approach with six or seven people throwing in ideas. "The game's design was a team effort, but mainly controlled by the guys who worked in-house at Micro Power," explains Gary. "Certainly Alan Butcher, Ian Clemmett, Tony Heaton and Bob Simpson each had a large input, with Tony and I probably less so, with us being physically remote. Others no doubt had input into the game." Kidd's, the local agency Micro Power used for its advertising, was also involved in designing the look of the titular mines in which the Doctor finds himself.

The reason for this subterranean jaunt was explained in the scene-setting backstory that came with the game. The Master is up to his old tricks again, trying to take control of the universe using something called a Time Instant Replay Unit. This gizmo requires a mineral that's been mined on the second moon of the planet Rijar, and the Time Lords send the Doctor there to ▶

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE TRIO OF DIFFERENT VERSIONS MEASURED UP

BBC MICRO

■ The scrolling is not as silky smooth as *Castle Quest*, but it's certainly not "abominable" as described by *CVG*. Thanks to the ROM chip, the game is admirably large and it's very easy to get lost in the sprawling mining complex. The original release suffers from a lack of in-game sound, but the enhanced BBC+/Master version addresses this with tunes and effects.

AMSTRAD CPC

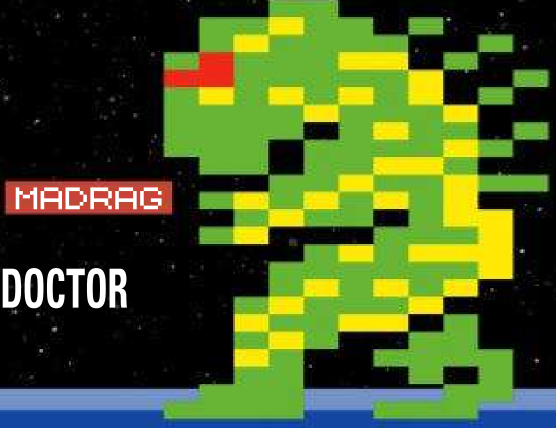
■ Almost a carbon copy of the BBC Micro version, with just a few subtle tweaks to the map layout. The sprites flicker quite a bit, and the original's gaudy colour scheme is retained, which raises the question: could it have been better adapted for the hardware? Probably. Like the Beeb version, there's music on the title screen but very little sound elsewhere.

C64

■ Unlike the CPC version, this has been written with the C64 in mind and it benefits from smooth scrolling, hardware sprites and reworked graphics. Other changes include a moving lift system, similar to the one in *Dynamite Dan*, which you use to travel between floors. Several in-game tunes are featured, but for some reason the TV theme is not one of them.

ADVENTURES IN TIME

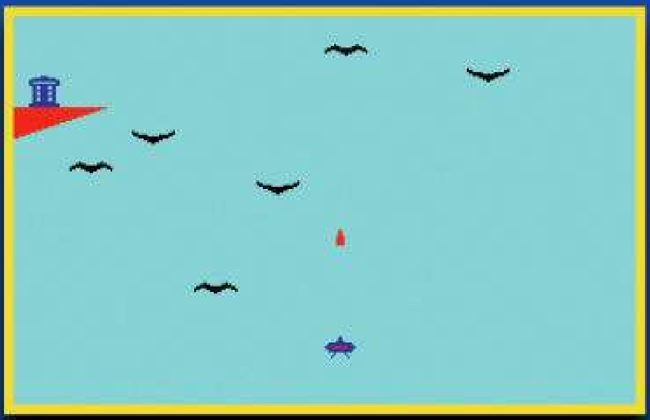
MORE GAMES THE DOCTOR HAS STARRED IN



DOCTOR WHO: THE FIRST ADVENTURE

SYSTEM: BBC Micro
YEAR: 1983

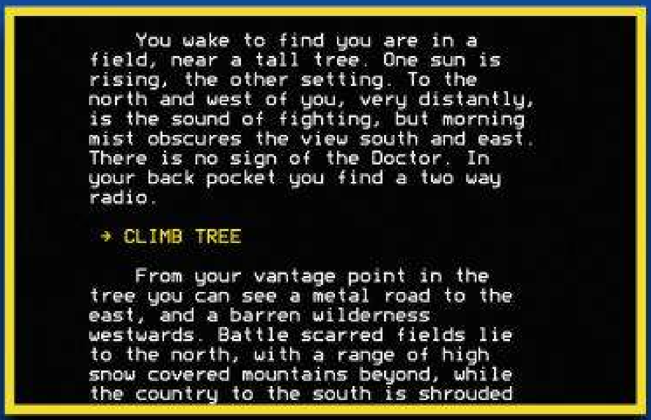
Notable for being the first official *Doctor Who* game, and little else. It's basically a collection of single-screen arcade games – one minute you're escaping a maze, the next you're shooting pterodactyls (pictured). There's even a *Frogger*-esque stage. According to the cover, you're supposedly playing the fifth Doctor (Peter Davison), but it's hard to tell really.



DOCTOR WHO AND THE WARLORD

SYSTEM: BBC Micro
YEAR: 1985

The second tie-in from BBC Soft takes the form of a brain-bending text adventure. There are actually two separate parts – one set in the future, the other the past – and in both you play the Doctor's trusty assistant. This one is of special interest to fans as it was designed by Graham Williams who produced three series of the show during Tom Baker's tenure.

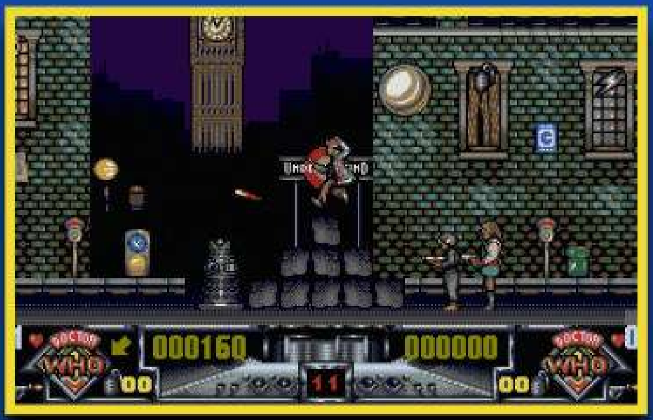


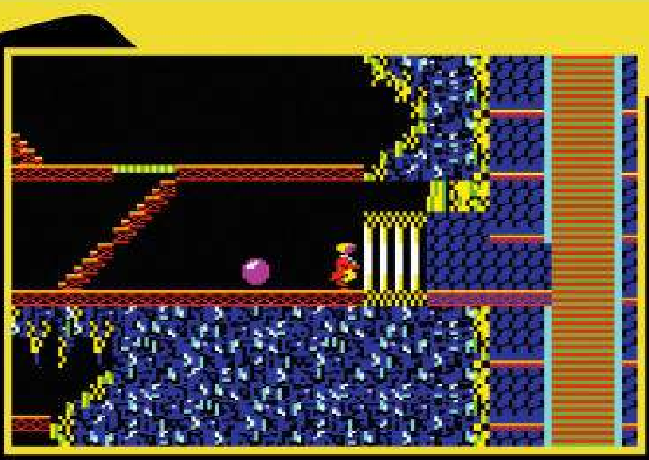
```
    You wake to find you are in a
field, near a tall tree. One sun is
rising, the other setting. To the
north and west of you, very distantly,
is the sound of fighting, but morning
mist obscures the view south and east.
There is no sign of the Doctor. In
your back pocket you find a two way
radio.

 → CLIMB TREE

    From your vantage point in the
tree you can see a metal road to the
east, and a barren wilderness
westwards. Battle scarred fields lie
to the north, with a range of high
snow covered mountains beyond, while
the country to the south is shrouded
```

DALEK ATTACK

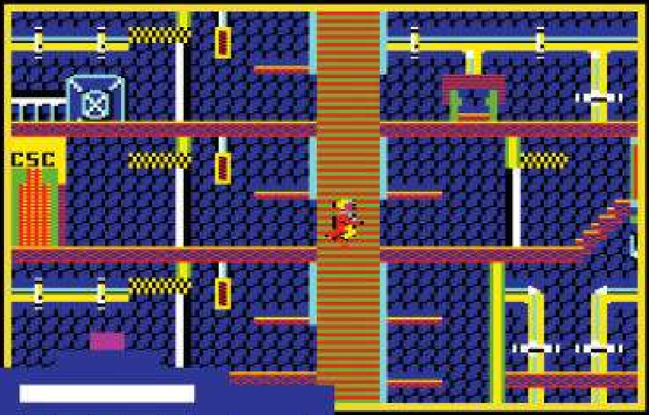
SYSTEMS: Various
YEAR: 1992

We move awkwardly from a cerebral adventure to a run-and-gun platformer in which the Doctor (you can choose from several iterations) bounces around the screen, zapping villains with his sonic screwdriver. Yes, *Dalek Attack* is anything but dull, and actually rather fun – particularly for Whovians as there's fan service aplenty. The Atari ST version is shown here.

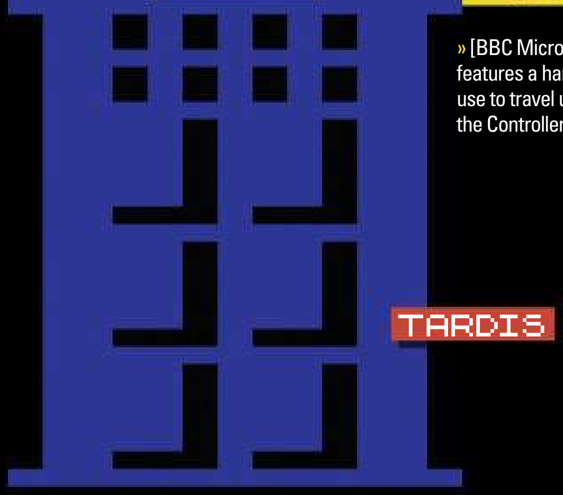




» [BBC Micro] When following you Splinx transforms into a pink ball. For animation reasons presumably.



» [BBC Micro] The main complex features a handy 'lift' which you can use to travel up and down. Thankfully the Controllers can't use it.



disable the device, steal the plans and thwart the Master's devious plot. To progress the Doctor has to solve a series of item-based puzzles, while avoiding Controller droids that patrol the complex, and Madrag lizard-things who like to eat intruders. Aside from his wit and wisdom, the Doctor can also call on Splinx the cybernetic cat to help him.

Hang on. Controllers? Splinx the *cat*? Something's not quite right here. "Daleks and K9 were not used for two reasons – money and licences," reveals Gary. "From what I recall, Terry Nation owned the rights to the Daleks, and Bob Baker and Dave Martin owned the rights to K9. The BBC, I guess, was unable to grant usage when it didn't have the rights to grant. Both the Controllers and Splinx were obvious copies of Daleks and K9. I however ensured my Controllers could navigate stairs."

The detailed backstory was one of several printed items included inside the lavish, videocassette-sized package, alongside the tape or disk. And on the BBC Micro there was something else – a 16K ROM chip that users had to slot into their system before loading. Unlike most of the bundled items, this was more than just a sales gimmick. "The game ran in Mode 2 which left around 12K of RAM in total, which was clearly insufficient to allow for all the data," says Gary. "I used the complete 16K of the ROM space for the map and graphics. If it had been a disk-only product then dynamic fetching from disk would have been an option, but a tape version was a prerequisite."

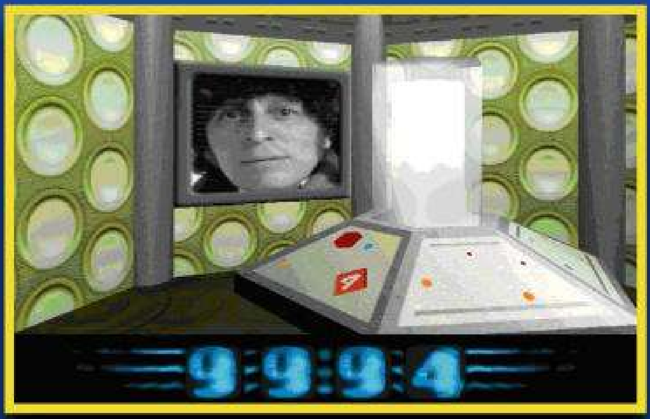
In addition to the extra space, which allowed for a bigger 28K adventure, the ROM chip brought an added benefit: it made pirating the game almost impossible. "I later created a version for the BBC+ and BBC Master micros which didn't require the additional ROM and utilised the inbuilt sideways RAM instead. This obviously didn't have the intrinsic level of anti-piracy mechanisms." What this enhanced version did have was new in-game music and sound effects. There was more Gary originally planned to put in too. "Whilst waiting for game design decisions, I wrote some subgames which never saw the light of day. They will no doubt be on floppy disks that have been waiting to be recovered for many years." Pushed on these subgames that didn't make the cut, Gary says, "The main sidegame was a computer hacking type affair, the idea being to crack the computer system on the moon the game was set. I really need to extract the data from the old floppies. My wife bought me a KryoFlux to try and recover them, yet they

> "THE GAME RAN IN MODE 2 WHICH LEFT AROUND 12K OF RAM, WHICH WAS CLEARLY INSUFFICIENT TO ALLOW FOR ALL THE DATA"
> **GARY PARTIS**

DESTINY OF THE DOCTORS

SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1997

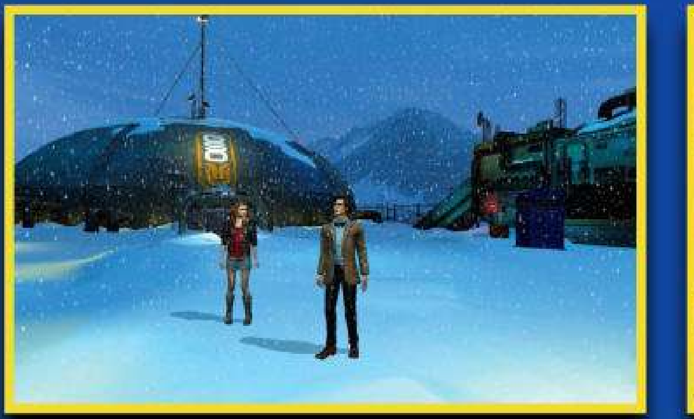
In another unlikely move, the next game of note is a first-person adventure in which you explore the TARDIS in 3D. The aim is to rescue each of the first seven Doctors by successfully completing the Master's challenges. In a nice touch, several early Doctors return to voice their roles, including Tom Baker and Peter Davison. It also features a database of *Doctor Who* lore.



DOCTOR WHO: THE ADVENTURE GAMES

SYSTEMS: PC, Mac
YEAR: 2010

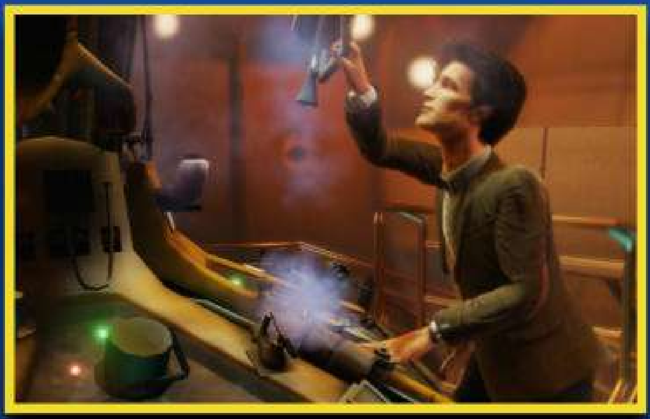
Following the show's reboot, a glut of games appeared and this episodic series featuring Matt Smith's eleventh Doctor is the highlight. The episodes were scripted by writers from the show and the games were developed by Sumo Digital with input from Revolution's Charles Cecil – so no shortage of talent. And best of all – they were free to download!

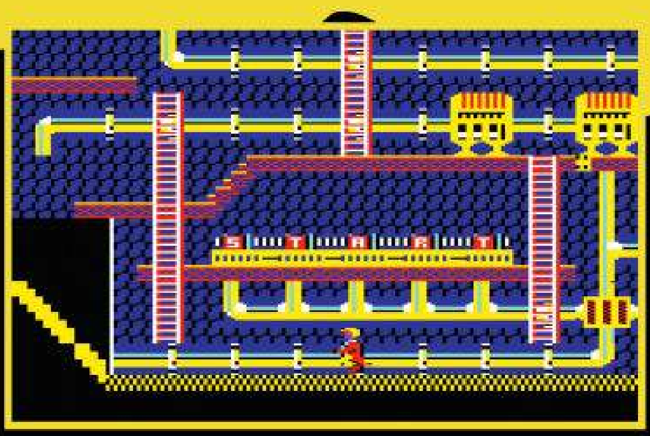


DOCTOR WHO: THE ETERNITY CLOCK

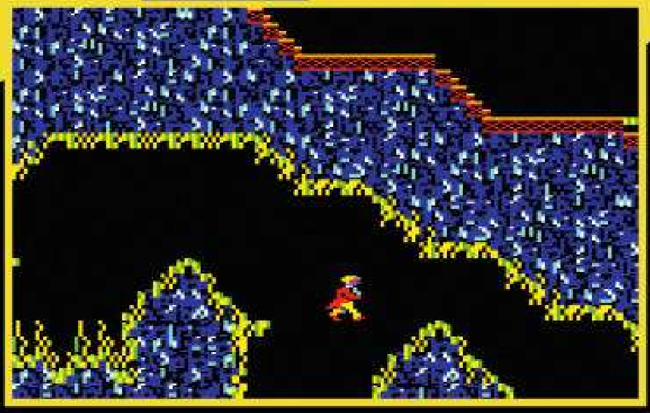
SYSTEMS: PS3, PS Vita, PC
YEAR: 2012

Wisely sidestepping the games for the Nintendo Wii and DS, we arrive at this platform puzzle game developed by Supermassive Games. It also features the 11th Doctor, who's joined here by River Song (with an option for co-operative play). Sequels were planned but canned, which is a shame as this is one of the better tie-ins to appear in recent years.





» [BBC Micro] These curious lettered circuit boards are surely part of some elaborate puzzle?



» [BBC Micro] Literal leaps of faith over deadly chasms are all in a day's work for the Doctor.

still wait, and wait, and wait a bit more." The development of the game continued throughout the summer of 1985 and the pressure started to build as autumn arrived. "There was no internet as we know it now, but I did have a 300 baud dial-up modem, so there were constant hourly emails demanding progress reports. At the end of the development I spent time at Micro Power getting the final touches complete. It was a bit of a rush, so I guess more time would have been advantageous, but deadlines are there for a reason, especially when the game was to be launched for the Christmas market."

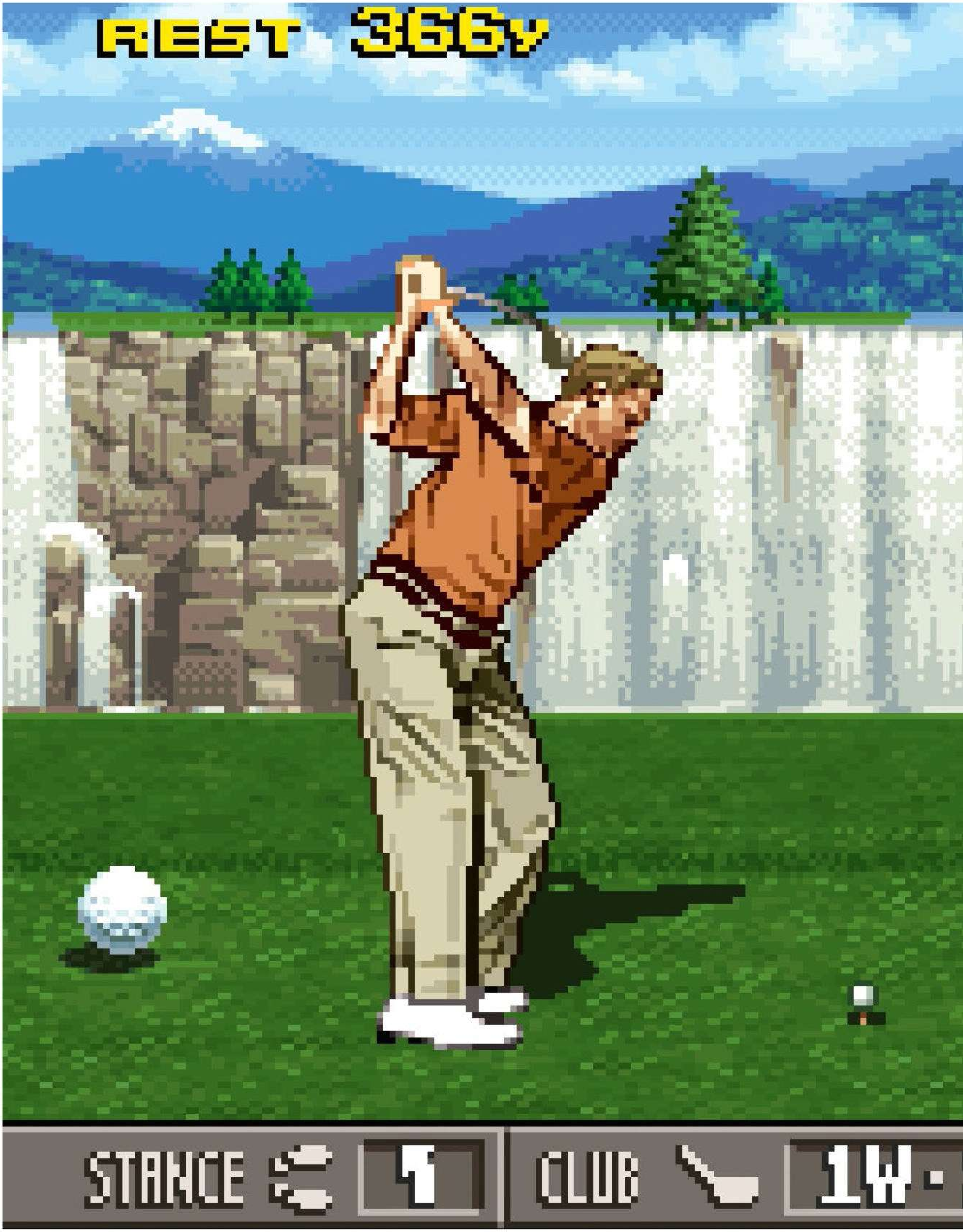
The BBC version did make it out before the end of the year, but despite being backed by a reported £25k advertising campaign, and reviewing reasonably well (a 5/10 from *CVG* and a 7/10 from *The Micro User*), it was clear that sales didn't meet Micro Power's expectations. The premium price can't have helped, with the ROM chip driving the cost up to £19 for the tape version, and a pound more for disk. The game was less expensive and reviewed better on the Commodore 64 (the *ZZap!* lads awarded it 86% and called it "a very good arcade adventure"), but it still failed to trouble the top 30 all-format sales chart. The Amstrad CPC release followed, but there were problems with the Spectrum version due to the game's full-screen scrolling. In a preview, *Computer Gamer* magazine wrote, "The Spectrum version is a bit disappointing. Due to limitations of the graphics and hardware, the display does not take up the whole screen, but a small window in the top left-hand corner. The rest of the screen is filled with pictures of the Doctor and a small schematic map." This version was delayed several times before being scrapped.

It's often claimed that the game brought about Micro Power's collapse. As he worked remotely, Gary was sheltered from the day-to-day demands of the business and isn't able to comment on that. However, Alan Butcher, Micro Power's software manager, tells us that there were several reasons for the eventual demise of the company and it can't be laid solely at the Doctor's door.

The TV show may have been on rocky ground back when the game was released, but its popularity has skyrocketed since it was resurrected by the BBC in 2005. Just prior to the reboot, Gary did consider updating the game for modern platforms. "I contacted Bob Simpson, the managing director of Micro Power, to check for any legalities. He seemed to think a low-key release would not attract any attention from any interested parties. However, it never happened as normal work got in the way."

For Gary, that normal work involves software and electronics engineering rather than games, but he still looks back fondly on the time when he developed *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror* for Micro Power. "It was 1985. I was 18 years old and I had lessons, revision and two large projects to complete for A-level computer studies and technology. I was also training towards my karate black belt. In addition to this were the normal teenage pursuits such as drinking as much as possible. Plus writing a game with a big name title! Seriously though, we can look upon all parts of our lives with fondness, for one reason or another – if only to progress past that stage and move onto the next."

Before we let Gary go, we have one more important question. The obvious question. Who's *his* favourite Doctor Who? "More recently it was David Tennant," he says. "But as a child, it had to be Tom Baker, complete with long scarf and Jelly Babies." ★


REST 366Y
STANCE
CLUB
1W

Neo Turf Masters

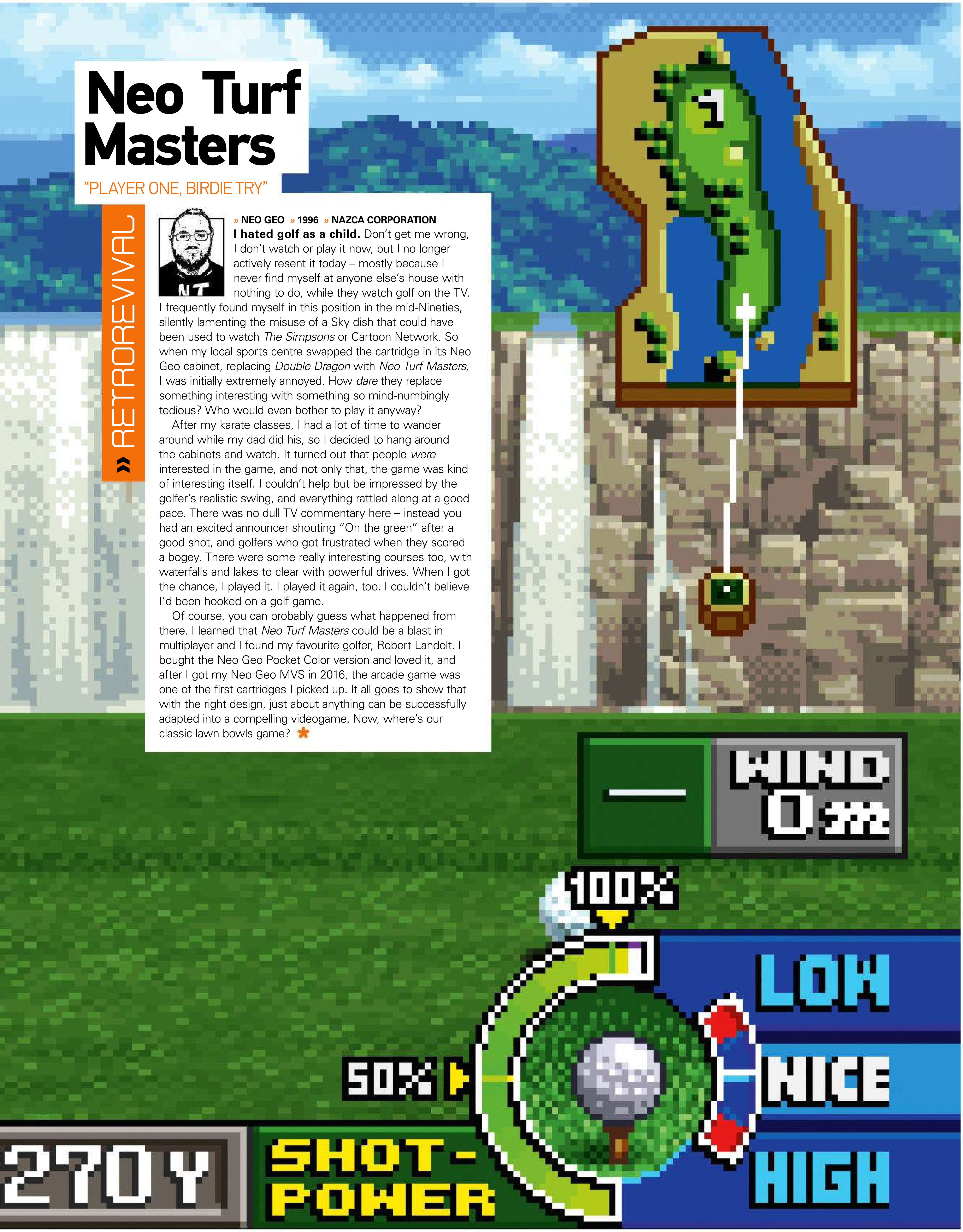
“PLAYER ONE, BIRDIE TRY”

» NEO GEO » 1996 » NAZCA CORPORATION

I hated golf as a child. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t watch or play it now, but I no longer actively resent it today – mostly because I never find myself at anyone else’s house with nothing to do, while they watch golf on the TV. I frequently found myself in this position in the mid-Nineties, silently lamenting the misuse of a Sky dish that could have been used to watch *The Simpsons* or Cartoon Network. So when my local sports centre swapped the cartridge in its Neo Geo cabinet, replacing *Double Dragon* with *Neo Turf Masters*, I was initially extremely annoyed. How *dare* they replace something interesting with something so mind-numbingly tedious? Who would even bother to play it anyway?

After my karate classes, I had a lot of time to wander around while my dad did his, so I decided to hang around the cabinets and watch. It turned out that people *were* interested in the game, and not only that, the game was kind of interesting itself. I couldn’t help but be impressed by the golfer’s realistic swing, and everything rattled along at a good pace. There was no dull TV commentary here – instead you had an excited announcer shouting “On the green” after a good shot, and golfers who got frustrated when they scored a bogey. There were some really interesting courses too, with waterfalls and lakes to clear with powerful drives. When I got the chance, I played it. I played it again, too. I couldn’t believe I’d been hooked on a golf game.

Of course, you can probably guess what happened from there. I learned that *Neo Turf Masters* could be a blast in multiplayer and I found my favourite golfer, Robert Landolt. I bought the Neo Geo Pocket Color version and loved it, and after I got my Neo Geo MVS in 2016, the arcade game was one of the first cartridges I picked up. It all goes to show that with the right design, just about anything can be successfully adapted into a compelling videogame. Now, where’s our classic lawn bowls game? ✱



SIDE
Studio Profile
Low Noise
60
30 Minutes per side

STUDIO PROFILE

ARC DEVELOPMENTS

Arc Developments was founded in 1988 and had a string of successful games including conversions of Forgotten Worlds, Crackdown, The Simpsons and WWF European Rampage Tour, along with original titles like Johnny Bazookatone. This is the developer's interesting story

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON

X-RAY SPECS
200
3
909
22

» [Amstrad CPC] Arc's first football game was created by a team including people who did not like football, or supported rival teams.

WHELAN
LIVERPOOL 0
LUTON 5
B STEIN

Elite Systems was a computer games publisher in Aldridge, Walsall. In the early Eighties, the Wilcox family built the company into a successful publisher of mainly licensed products, based on well-known TV programmes, famous personalities, arcade coin-op licences or well-known brands. As the company grew, it assembled a group of in-house and freelance programmers, artists and musicians. Among those who worked for Elite were programmers Byron Nilsson, Richard Underhill, Chris Coupe and graphic artist Paul Walker.

Byron began his career at Dalali Software before joining Elite, whilst Richard Underhill was a freelancer who was headhunted by Steve Wilcox in 1986. Paul Walker's journey to Elite also started as a freelancer whilst he was still at school, initially drawing loading screens before progressing to in-game graphics. Elite eventually offered him a full-time job working as a graphics supervisor. Paul accepted the job and found himself managing a team of eight.

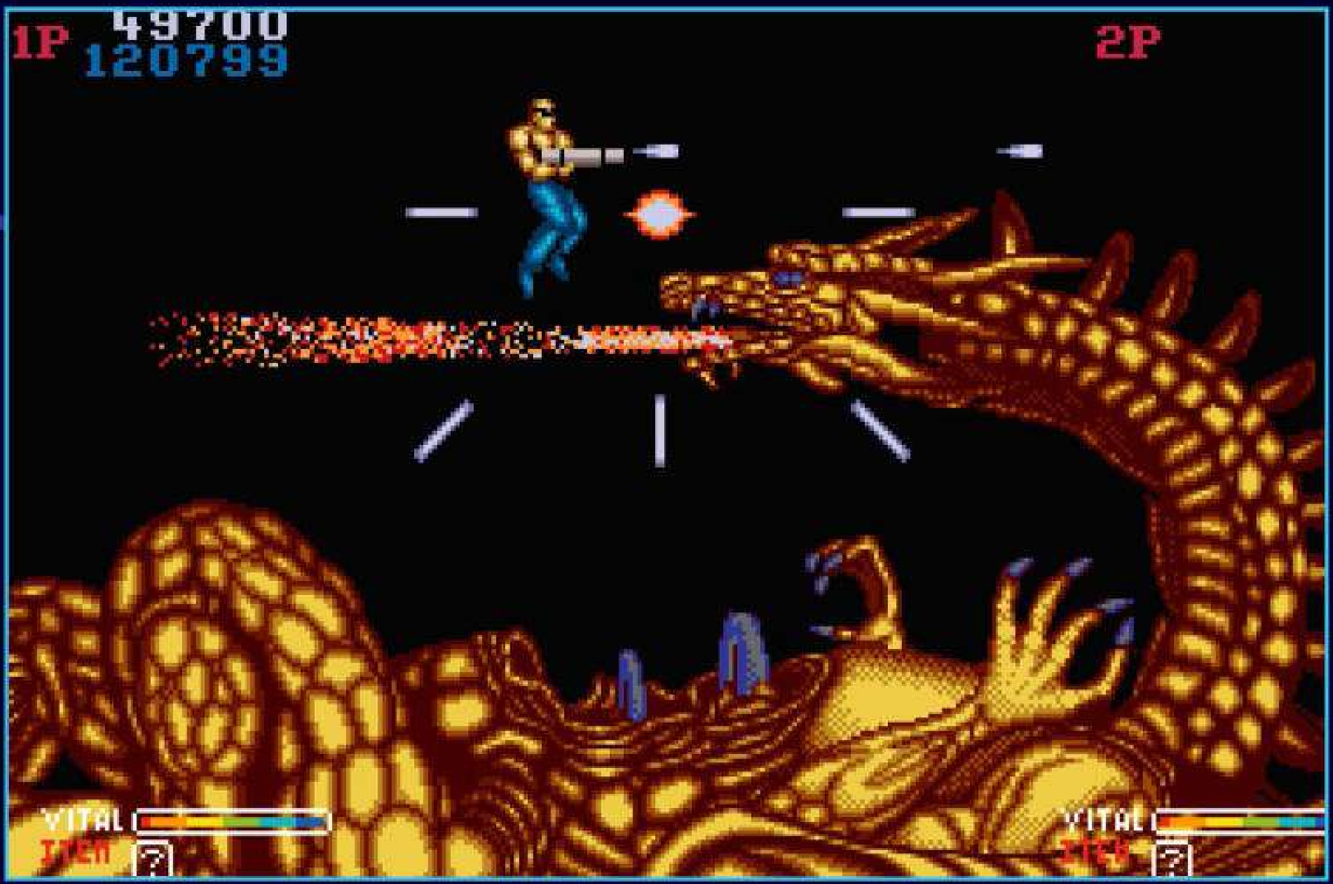
Titles that Paul worked on with Byron, Richard and Chris at Elite included an adaptation of the 1973 James Bond film *Live And Let Die*, *Mike Reid's Pop Quiz*, conversions of popular arcade games like *Buggy Boy* and *Bomb Jack*, as well as *Overlander*, but the friends found that it could sometimes be difficult working there.

Byron eventually realised that he needed to make a change to his career and that he wanted to have a lot more control over his destiny. "It wasn't that I was particularly unhappy, but I wanted to set up my own business," he tells us. "For me, that was the goal, having spent the previous five years coding for other people."

Richard found himself talking to Byron about the possibility of setting up a new company of their own when the pair and the rest of Elite's staff went to a corporate event. Paul was sitting close enough to overhear Richard and Byron's conversation about creating an independent development team and his ears immediately pricked up. "I offered myself as their graphic artist and that's the moment when Arc Developments was born," says Paul.

A few other Elite programmers were offered the chance to join, but only Chris Coupe took them up. None of the others were prepared to take the leap without guaranteed work. "I knew a producer at US Gold called David Baxter," explains Byron. "So, before we left Elite, we got a gentleman's agreement from Dave to convert the *Forgotten Worlds* coin-op."

US Gold's Geoff Brown paid Arc an advance on royalties to help it get started. Having reached

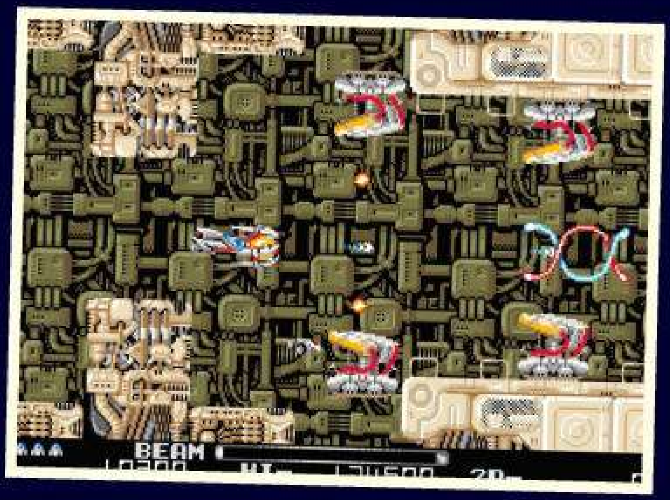


» [Amiga] Arc's *Forgotten Worlds* coin-op conversions for US Gold were excellent on all platforms and gave it a fantastic start.

the point of no return, leaving Elite turned out to be less painful than the friends had expected. "It was a case of 'there's the door' when we told them," says Paul. "We didn't serve any notice period." Having left, second on the team's agenda was a company name. Chris Coupe suggested Arc Developments and Paul designed the first logo which endured for the next five or six years. As for Arc's location, the newly formed company initially worked out of Paul's rented house in Sutton Coldfield. "I would get up in the morning and tidy my bedroom. As it was my room, I got to use the desk," laughs Paul about their new place of work. "For some reason, my friend and former tenant Paul Holmes had acquired various road signs, so I laid them across my bed and the others would come in with their computers and monitors, balance them on the signs then begin work."

> "I WOULD GET UP AND TIDY MY BEDROOM. AS IT WAS MY ROOM, I GOT TO USE THE DESK"
>
> **PAUL WALKER**

The small team immediately hired extra programmers, Warren McCormack and Tim Round. "One of the other tenants left, so Warren moved into their room," says Paul. "Tim worked from inside my cupboard. I'd move my clothes over, stick a cardboard box in there and put the monitor on top. We worked like that for about six months."



» [Amiga] Arc's *R-Type II* coin-op conversion on the Amiga for Activision was very close to the original arcade game.

A *Forgotten Worlds* arcade cabinet set to free-play was delivered and for five months Arc could play it as much as it needed to get the conversions done, as Byron recollects. "Playing *Forgotten Worlds* for hours on end as part of the research was good fun!"

Although Arc had programmers and a graphic artist, it did not have anyone to do sound, so it drafted Chris Coupe's brother, Tim. "Tim brought his Atari ST and we ended up soldering two wires onto the arcade cabinet's speakers to sample the sound effects and music directly," says Paul. "The game took almost half an hour to finish and one day I played up to the end, except Tim wasn't ready. Right then, the monitor popped, but you could still hear the game, so I played the whole thing again, effectively blindfolded. Because I knew from the sounds what was happening, I got back to the end and Tim was able to sample that last tune in."

The massive success of Arc's *Forgotten Worlds* conversions soon led to a second coin-op conversion commission from US Gold. "The main problem we had with the *Crackdown* coin-op was it didn't have a pause mode, so getting to accurately copy the graphics from the cabinet was a lot trickier," admits Paul.

By the time work was underway on *Crackdown*, Arc had moved to a building in Lichfield Street, Walsall, complete with purple walls, orange skirting boards and a blue main door. From that office the team completed their next few projects, including *Crackdown* and the 16-bit conversions of the

▶

TIMELINE

1988
■ Richard, Byron, Chris and Paul resign from Elite and create Arc Developments in Walsall.

1988
■ Conversions of the *Forgotten Worlds* coin-op for US Gold are produced from Paul Walker's house.

1989
■ A small office in Walsall is found and becomes Arc Development's new home.

1989
■ Arc's 16-bit *Dragon Breed* conversions cement its reputation as coin-op conversion experts.

1990
■ As more employees arrive, Arc moves again to an even larger office, around the corner.

1991
■ Ocean Software contracts Arc to produce multiple home computer conversions of *Bart Vs The Space Mutants*.

1991
■ Arc produce many new titles including *R-Type II* and begins Sega console development for Mirrorsoft.

1992
■ Acclaim publishes Arc's Sega console games after much delay, following Mirrorsoft's sudden demise in late 1991.

1992
■ WWF is huge thanks to Sky TV and *WWF European Rampage Tour* conversions keep Arc afloat.

1992
■ Arc produces multiple games for Ocean, Grandslam, Virgin and US Gold to spread the risk.

1993
■ More Sega 8-bit conversions for Acclaim as home gaming consoles begin to dominate the UK.

1994
■ Arc expands within the same office building as it takes on more and more developers.

1994
■ *World Cup Golf* on 3DO is Arc's first CD-based title, as game development costs rise.

1996
■ Arc's success allows it to invest in expensive Silicon Graphics Workstations needed for next-gen development.

1996
■ A big investment is made in a motion-capture studio in Telford, to produce next-gen 3D titles.

1996
■ Virgin signs Arc's first motion-capture game for over £1 million, featuring Jack The Ripper.

1997
■ Arc's 3D arcade game *Rosco McQueen* for the PlayStation is heavily promoted throughout the year.

1998
■ Rumours of problems at Arc reach Virgin, it then cancels the *Jack The Ripper* game.

1998
■ Serious financial issues causes Arc to call in a liquidator in late January 1998.

1998
■ The PlayStation football game *4-4-2* is Arc's last developed title, published after its demise.

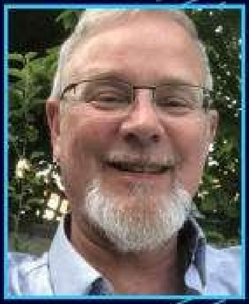
FLYING EDGE

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

BYRON NILSSON

■ After leaving Arc Developments, Byron set up Slippery Snake Studio and worked on the completion of *Rosco McQueen* for Sony Entertainment. Byron then went freelance, programming for Gravity-i and Dave Palmer and he also released an iPhone game, *Hairy Blox*. He currently runs a glamping site near the coast and programs for pleasure during the winter. Byron is also a technical diving instructor and sails racing yachts.

PAUL WALKER

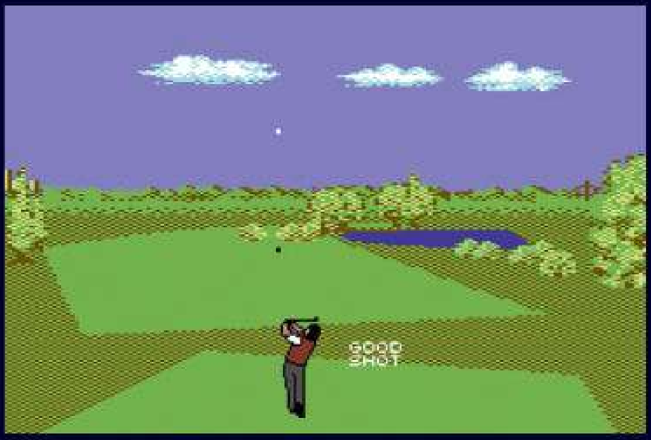


■ After helping many Arc colleagues find employment elsewhere, Paul then joined Sony, initially as a technical designer in Stroud, then as the design and content manager in Leeds, from where it achieved two BAFTA nominations and a BAFTA win for *Wip3out*. More recently, Paul switched to consulting for several worldwide brands to help them improve their digital workflow and is currently managing a team of developers across Europe and Asia.

RICHARD UNDERHILL

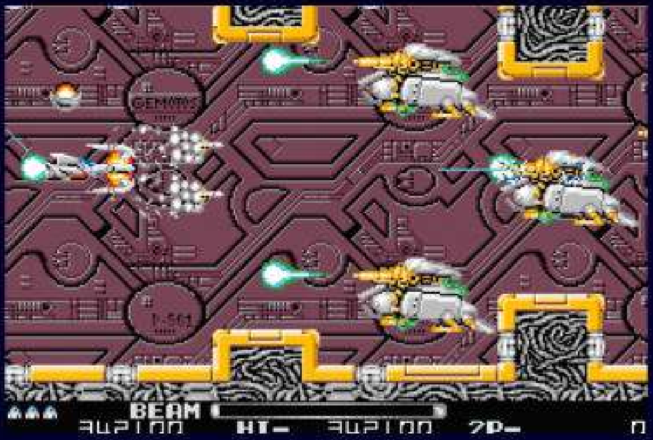
■ Richard moved to several UK developers and publishers after Arc Developments, including Psygnosis, Climax, Kuju and Empire, giving them the benefit of his experience and his programming expertise. He then set up as a computer games development and production consultant and worked for Marmalade and Samsung before moving to Unity, where he is a developer support engineer on the world's leading 2D and 3D development platform.

DNA OF ARC DEVELOPMENTS



KEEN GOLFERS

■ When Arc produced *Nick Faldo's Golf* for Grandslam in 1992, it became the first of four golf titles the studio developed in less than four years, across eight formats. "Quite a few of us liked playing golf, so we ended up doing several golf games because they always sold," reveals Byron.



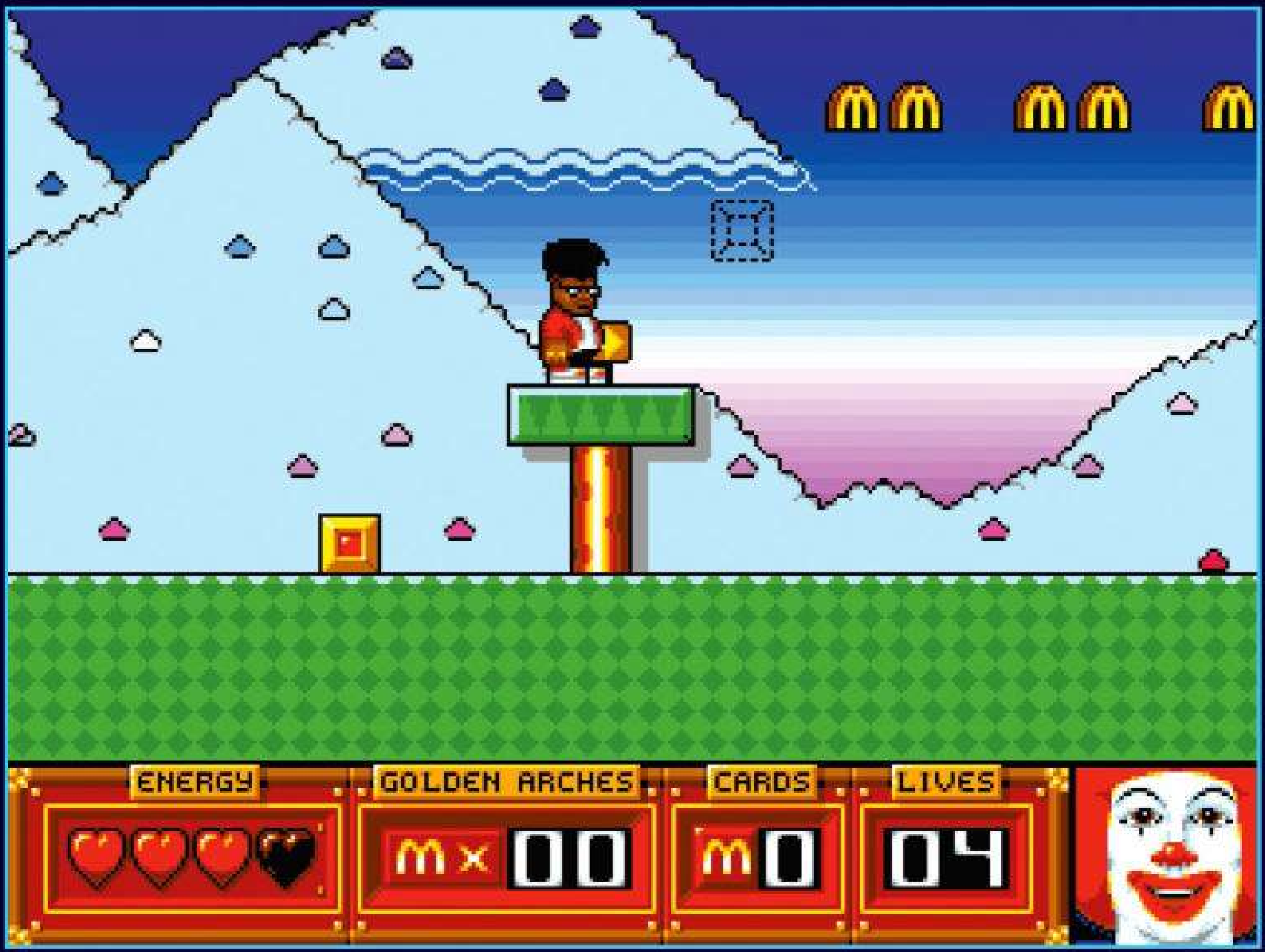
SHOOT TO THRILL

■ Sideway-scrolling shoot-'em-ups were definitely Arc's forte in the early years, producing no less than six different titles in that genre within its first three years, including home conversions of the coin-ops *Forgotten Worlds*, *Dragon Breed* and *R-Type II*, the final level of *Robozone* and its 16-bit *Armalyte* game.

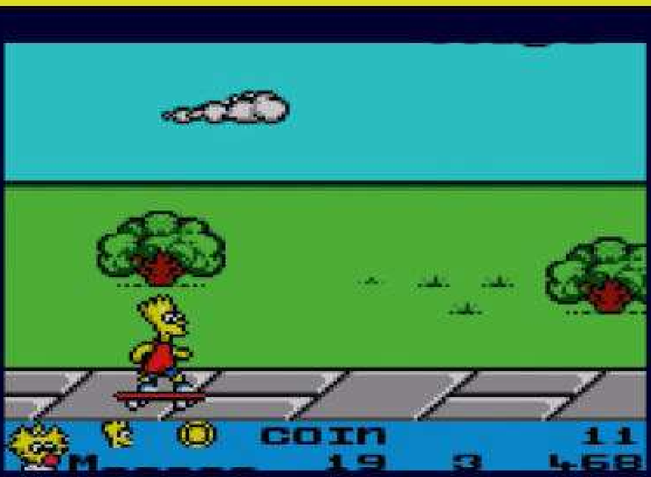
Irem coin-op *Dragon Breed*, coded by Chris Coupe, with graphics by Arc newcomer Paul Michalak. "Those first few years were hectic," recalls Byron. "We were all working long hours. Most of us would be in at eight o'clock in the morning and leave at eight at night, but we were enjoying it."

Arc's busy workload meant taking on more people and the developer needed larger premises again, moving around the corner into the former Co-operative building in Bridge Street. The large, open-plan top floor office gave the developer plenty of scope to expand in future, sharing the building with only one other tenant. New projects included 16-bit versions of Irem's *R-Type II* coin-op, a licensed Liverpool FC football game for Grandslam Entertainment, 8-bit conversions of the popular coin-op *Pang* for Ocean Software, Z80 conversions of Rainbow Arts' arcade blaster *X-Out* and 16-bit versions of the side-scrolling shooter *Armalyte* for Thalamus.

In 1990, Mirrorsoft approached Arc to work on *Robozone*, a game based upon an intended new TV series for kids, partly financed by Mirrorsoft and developed by Bob Keen from the makeup and special-effects company Image Animation, at Pinewood Studios. Test footage for the *Robozone*

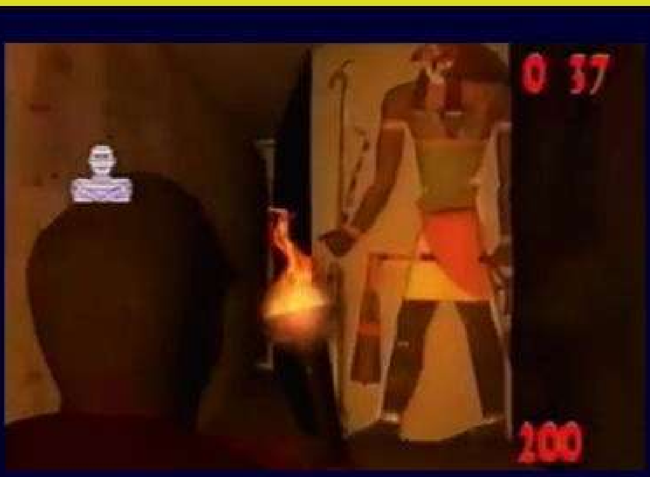


» [Amiga] *McDonald Land* was a conversion of the MC Kids console game and was a change of game style for Arc.



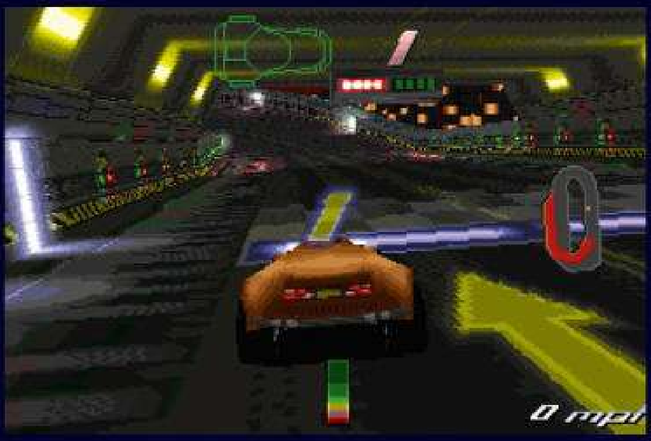
AYE CARAMBA!

Arc became extremely familiar with Matt Groening's *The Simpsons*, converting two *Bart Simpson* games across nine different platforms between 1990 and 1993. It quickly adjusted to the very precise and tight control that Matt exerted regarding his characters' appearance, once he realised the hardware limitations Arc had to work with.



TV PROJECTS

Arc created an interactive videogame for the TV show *Joe Razz*, producing 30 minutes of scripted footage on a 12.5-inch Laserdisc, along with the interactive game that responded to key-presses on a telephone handset. It also rendered 3D graphics for the intro to the BBC TV sitcom *The Real McCoy*.



ORIGINAL TITLES

Aside from the bountiful coin-op and console conversions it produced, Arc also created some original titles of its own, including *Beavers*, *Johnny Bazookatone*, *Rosco McQueen* and *Track Attack*. Had *First Contact* for Ocean and *Jack* for Virgin Interactive not been cancelled, then Arc might have reaped the rewards and endured.

TV series was shot but unfortunately, the proposed show never happened. As a result, Arc's ambitious game design became a three-part arcade title with no official licence deal to back it up.

Four home computer versions of the movie licence *Predator 2* for Mirrorsoft were up next, delivering a requested *Operation Wolf*-style on-rails arcade game, with levels based on key scenes and locations from the movie. Meanwhile, Ocean Software negotiated the home computer rights to the NES console game *Bart Simpson Vs The Space Mutants* and Arc got that job as well. In less than two years, it had become the go-to company for conversion work and was busier than ever.

Bally Midway's *Arch Rivals* coin-op on the Sega Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear for Mirrorsoft were completed in under four months, as Julian Scott recalls. "It was a case of learning the hardware on the job and I didn't use the Mega Drive hardware particularly well," he explains. "We had the arcade board and someone managed to extract the coin-op graphics by sticking wires into the board, which was a massive help."

Mirrorsoft also got the rights for the Sega console versions of *Bart Simpson Vs The Space Mutants* from right under Ocean's nose and it made perfect sense for Arc to get that commission. It already had intimate knowledge of the game and could use its existing source code as a starting point. "We used to get faxes direct from Matt Groening, which was pretty cool, but he would say things like, 'Too many teeth on Bart,' or, 'Too many strands of hair on Homer,' that kind of thing," explains Byron, smiling at the memory.

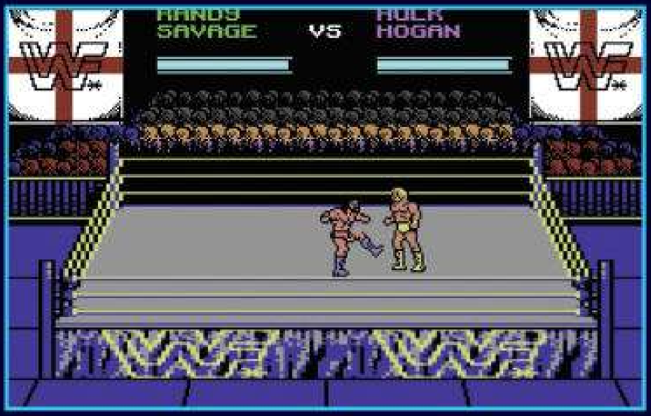
Both Sega projects went smoothly, but just as they were being finished, Mirrorsoft closed following the sudden death of owner and media tycoon Robert Maxwell. Arc's Sega games were published through Acclaim the following year, but Mirrorsoft's demise had a big impact, with Arc seeking new projects wherever it could to compensate. Thankfully, Ocean came to Arc's immediate rescue. "*WWF European Rampage Tour* kept Arc going after the collapse of Mirrorsoft," explains Richard, whilst Byron's recollections are more on the amusing side. "We got comments on WWF from the States saying things like, 'His fanny doesn't look right,' and we thought ,'What are they going on about?' We needed a translator!"

Unfortunately, Arc's 16-bit game *Restrictor* for Thalamus came to nothing when Thalamus collapsed, proving how volatile the industry had become. With the marketplace shifting towards consoles, Arc needed to keep up. To secure its future, a potential sale to US Gold was discussed, as Paul recalls. "They offered us half a million in cash and 1.5 million in shares but that didn't happen as we were turning over more than that and Geoff Brown then went and bought Core for a lot more money anyway."

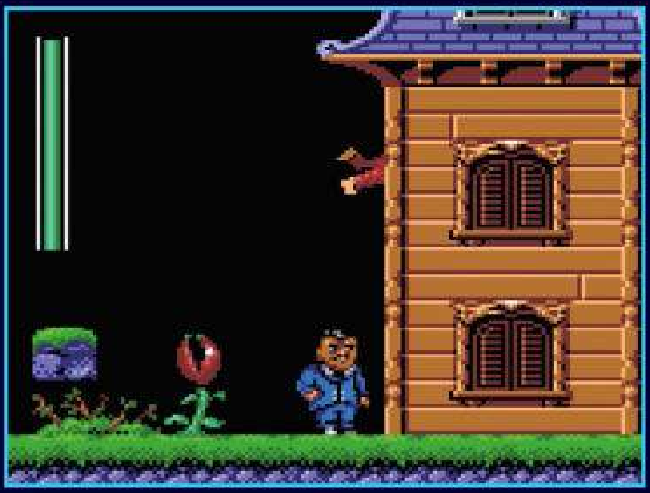
> "WWF EUROPEAN RAMPAGE KEPT ARC GOING AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF MIRRORSOFT"
>
> **RICHARD UNDERHILL**

Unfazed by this, Arc embarked on even more projects, including its first original title called *Beavers*, which was published by Grandslam, whose working relationship with Arc turned out to be anything but smooth. Other projects included *McDonald Land* for Virgin Games, *Scrabble* for US Gold and then the 8-bit Sega console versions of *The Addams Family* and conversions of *Bart Simpson Vs The World*, among others.

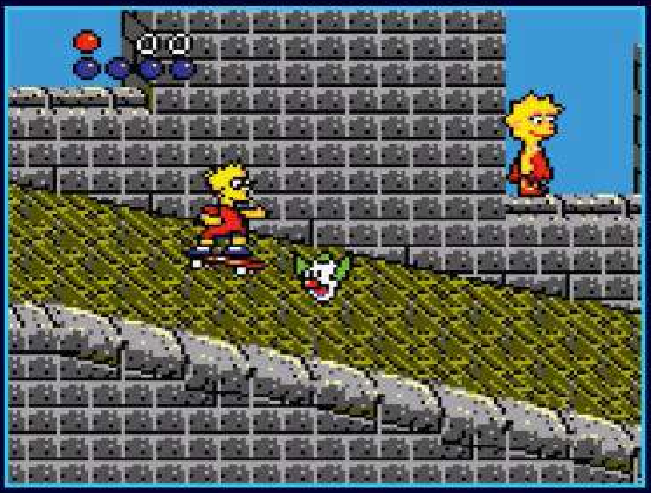
Z80 and PC programmer Stuart Middleton decided to leave Arc and start up his own development team with Tim Round. Their company Eden Entertainment were later sub-contracted by Arc to work on several titles over the next few years, as Arc continued the trend of never refusing work, apart from this one



» [C64] Arc produced four conversions of *WWF European Rampage Tour* for Ocean Software, giving it the lifeline it needed to continue.



» [Game Gear] Arc produced several Sega Game Gear and Master System titles in the early Nineties, including *The Addams Family*.



» [Game Gear] Computer and console conversions of *Bart Simpson Vs The Space Mutants* and *Bart Simpsons Vs The World* kept Arc busy.

ASTON VILLA 0 - 0 BAYERN 00 01
KICK OFF

particular time. "We were effectively bitches for hire, but that didn't stop us turning down Disney," admits Paul to us with a slight hint of regret. "We thought we were being clever at the time, but they just called our bluff, said fine and went elsewhere!"

By the mid-Nineties, the move from cartridges to higher capacity CDs on the Sony PlayStation, Sega Saturn, PC, 3DO and CDi, was exciting, but costly. "Things got crazily expensive once we moved to CD-ROM development," remembers Byron. Arc's CD-based games included original titles like *Johnny Bazookatone* for US Gold and futuristic racing game *Track Attack* for Microprose. Arc also dipped a tentative toe into TV production, providing interactive games, title sequences and in-programme graphics for TV shows *Joe Razz* and *The Real McCoy*.

As costly rendered graphics became the norm, Arc invested heavily in expensive Silicon Graphics Workstations. Ocean also loaned Arc a couple more when the publisher signed Arc's sci-fi adventure title, *First Contact*. Golf games followed on a variety of platforms and Arc developed a Windows 95 game called *Fly Fishing By JR Hartley*, featuring rendered rivers and digitised photo backgrounds. "We bought the licence from Yellow Pages for *JR Hartley*," says Paul. "We were a bit cash rich at the time and we were also close to owning *Captain Scarlet* but at the last minute an American buyer offered loads more money."

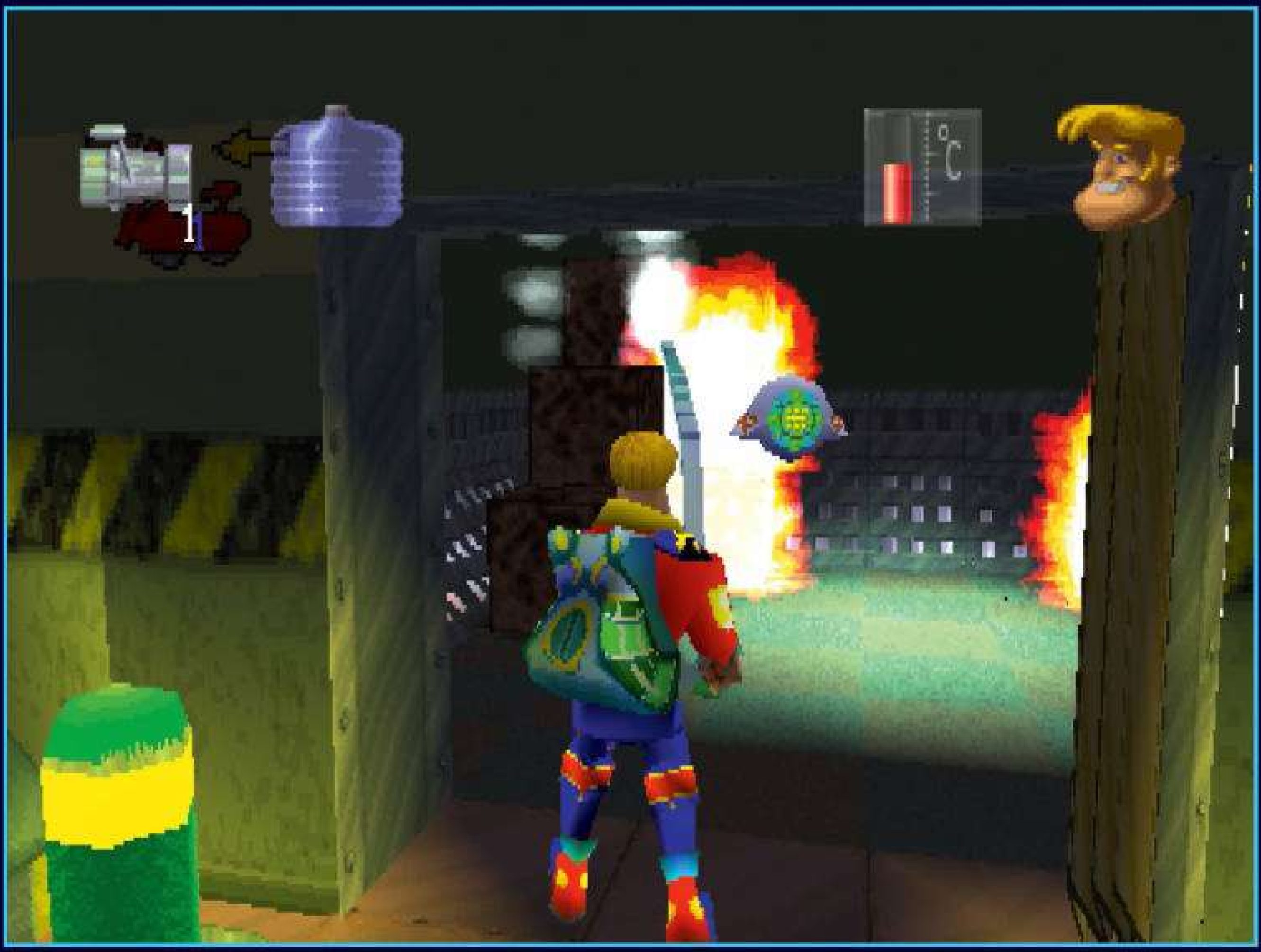
The desire to move Arc into more TV and film-style production resulted in a £110,000 investment with a company called Oxford Metrics to set up a motion-capture studio based in an old warehouse in Telford. A motion-capture-based game featuring Jack The Ripper was signed by Virgin Interactive Entertainment for £1.3 million in 1996 and a significant amount of development was put into the story and the 3D system it would employ, as Richard recalls. "It was a proper 3D engine like *Quake II* and I got involved on that with a couple of other coders."

» Arc's interactive game used key-tones from player's telephone handsets to confirm their choices, played live on national TV.

The plan was to capture the motion data and render the bodies using traditional textured polygons, but map video footage of the actors' faces onto the heads. That approach meant Arc also needed to set up a prosthetics department to complement the mo-cap studio.

> "THE FOUR OF US HAD PRETTY MUCH ALL FALLEN OUT BY THEN"
> **RICHARD UNDERHILL**

As Arc ramped up the Telford Studio, Ocean Software was in crisis and it cancelled the *First Contact* game without warning or explanation, turning up at Walsall, grabbing its SG hardware and marching out again. By then, Arc had over 70 people working for it in the Walsall and Telford studios,


» [PlayStation] *Rosco McQueen: Firefighter Extreme* on the Sony PlayStation was the second Arc game to be released following its closure.

HIGH ASPIRATIONS

ARC VISITS PINEWOOD

■ From Arc's perspective, the highlight of Mirrorsoft's *Robozone* project was its tour of Image Animation at Pinewood Studios, in February 1990. Parking by the Gotham City street set from the 1989 *Batman* movie, Paul Walker, Byron Nilsson, Stuart Middleton and Richard Underhill entered Image Animation's building with a couple of Mirrorsoft project managers and were shown around by Bob Keen, co-owner of the make-up and special-effects company.

Inside were dozens of screen-used props from *Hellraiser*, *Hardware*, *Waxwork*, the recent *Nightbreed* and the in-production *Highlander 2*. The actual reason for the team's visit was to see models and props for the proposed *Robozone* TV series. The look of the game was entirely based on the photographs and videos that Arc took that day, examining the protagonist Wolverine, the ruined New York city buildings and the spider-like robot baddies.

"That visit to Pinewood really inspired Paul and we ended up getting involved with the motion-capture studio later as a result. Creatively, that was a turning point for where we wanted to go," explains Byron. Unfortunately, *Robozone* failed to find the additional funding needed to go into production, but Mirrorsoft did manage to get Arc's game published across five formats the following year.

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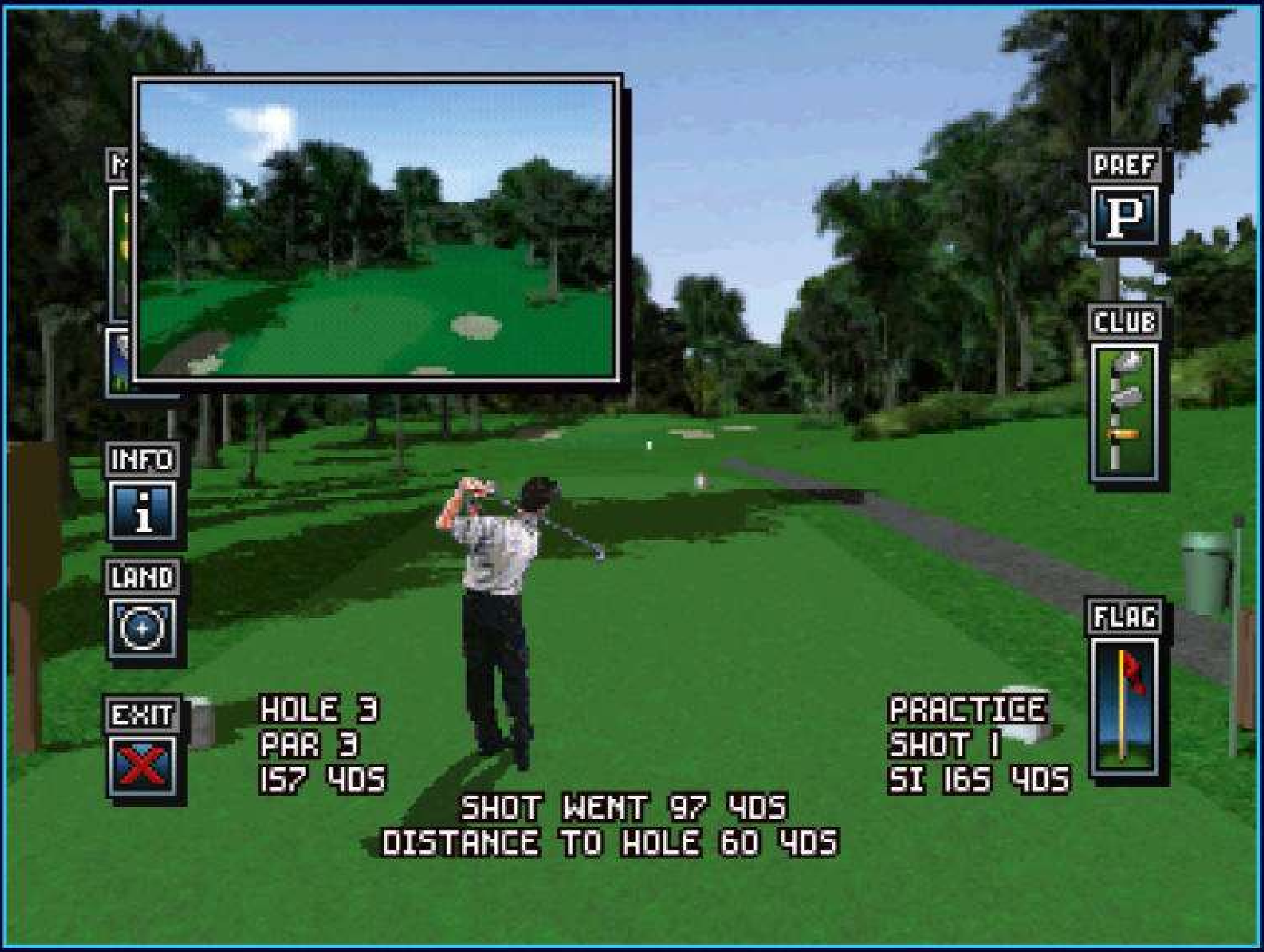
STAGE 3



» [3DO] *World Cup Golf* on the 3DO was Arc's first CD-based release and the first of its four golf games.

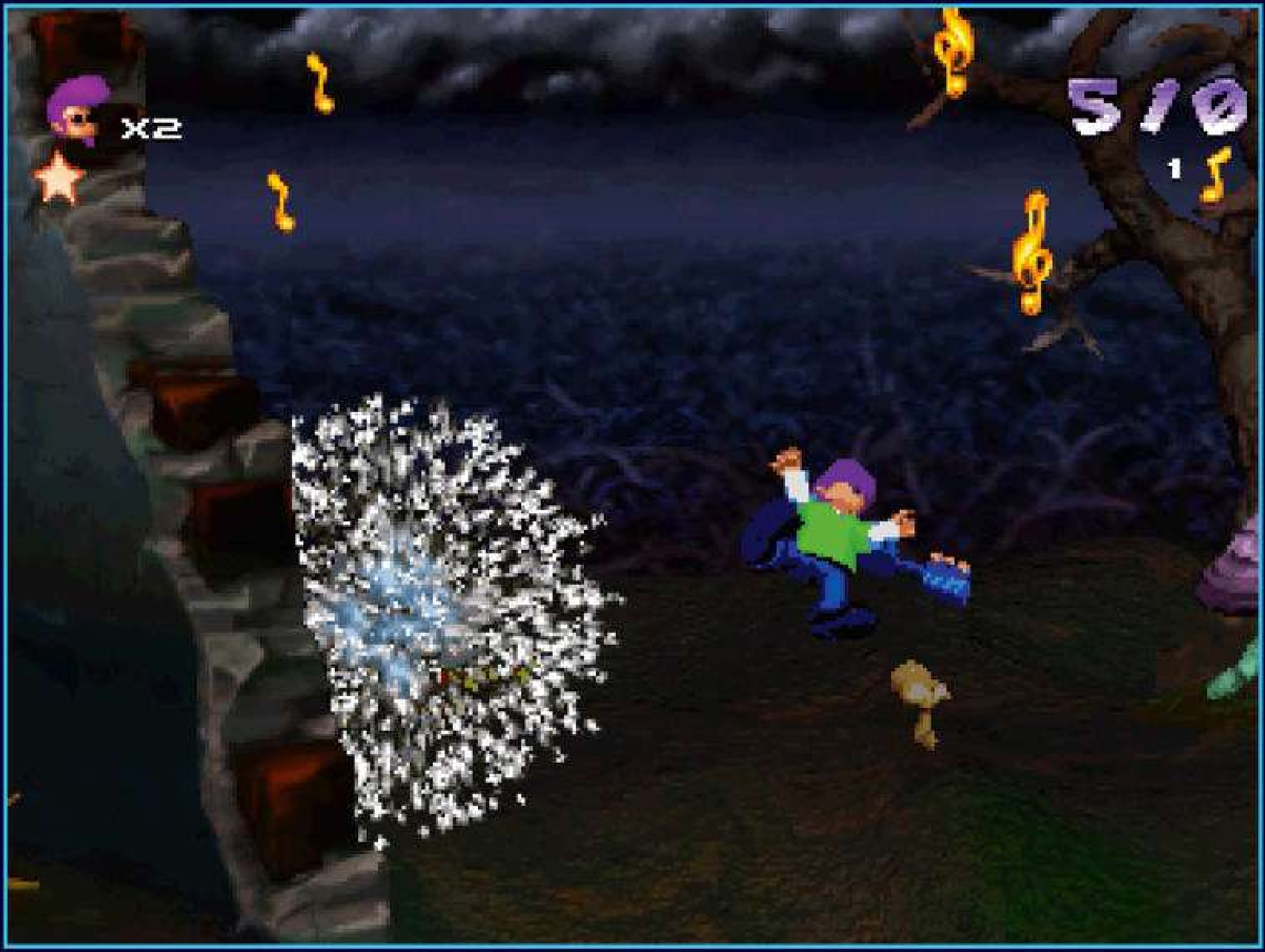
with almost half of them engaged in the *Jack* mo-cap project and one day it dawned on Paul how large they had become. "I was walking down the corridor and saw someone going the other way who I didn't recognise. I said, 'Who are you?' He didn't recognise me either and so I explained who I was and it turned out he'd been working at Arc for the past three months!"

"It was easy to grow," adds Byron. "In hindsight that was probably our mistake. We never really turned down work and we just got bigger and bigger."

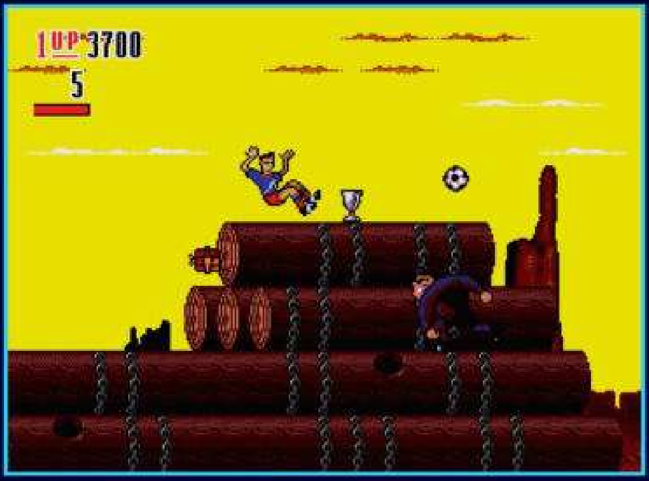
To the outside world, it looked like Arc was doing well, but problems were stacking up behind-the-scenes, involving the company accounts, contracts and money owed to HMRC. Rumours that Arc might be in trouble began to circulate. Virgin then became uncertain and decided to cancel the *Jack The Ripper* project with most of the work already complete. That would have been disastrous in isolation, but Arc was preparing to pitch the business to new investment partners at the time and during the preparation phase it was discovered that it was trading while insolvent. Paul had no choice but to call in liquidators, who wound up the company and put everyone out of a job.

The sudden and traumatic end to Arc Developments hit everyone hard and Richard admits that the pressure inevitably affected them. "The four of us had pretty much all fallen out by then," he says. "There was always some internal rivalry, so even if *Jack* and *First Contact* had been completed, there were differences of opinion regarding where the company was heading."

Had Arc moved away from the many conversions it worked on and concentrated more on creating its own IP earlier and had that tantalising flirtation with motion capture paid off, then maybe things might have turned out differently for the developer. Sadly, Arc's journey was on a downward trajectory from which it could not recover and some of the directors failed to spot the warning signs that things were not right until it was far too late for the studio. The legacy of what Arc Developments was able to achieve in almost a decade of producing games far outweighs the stressful way in which it ended, but the ultimate cost was friendship. *

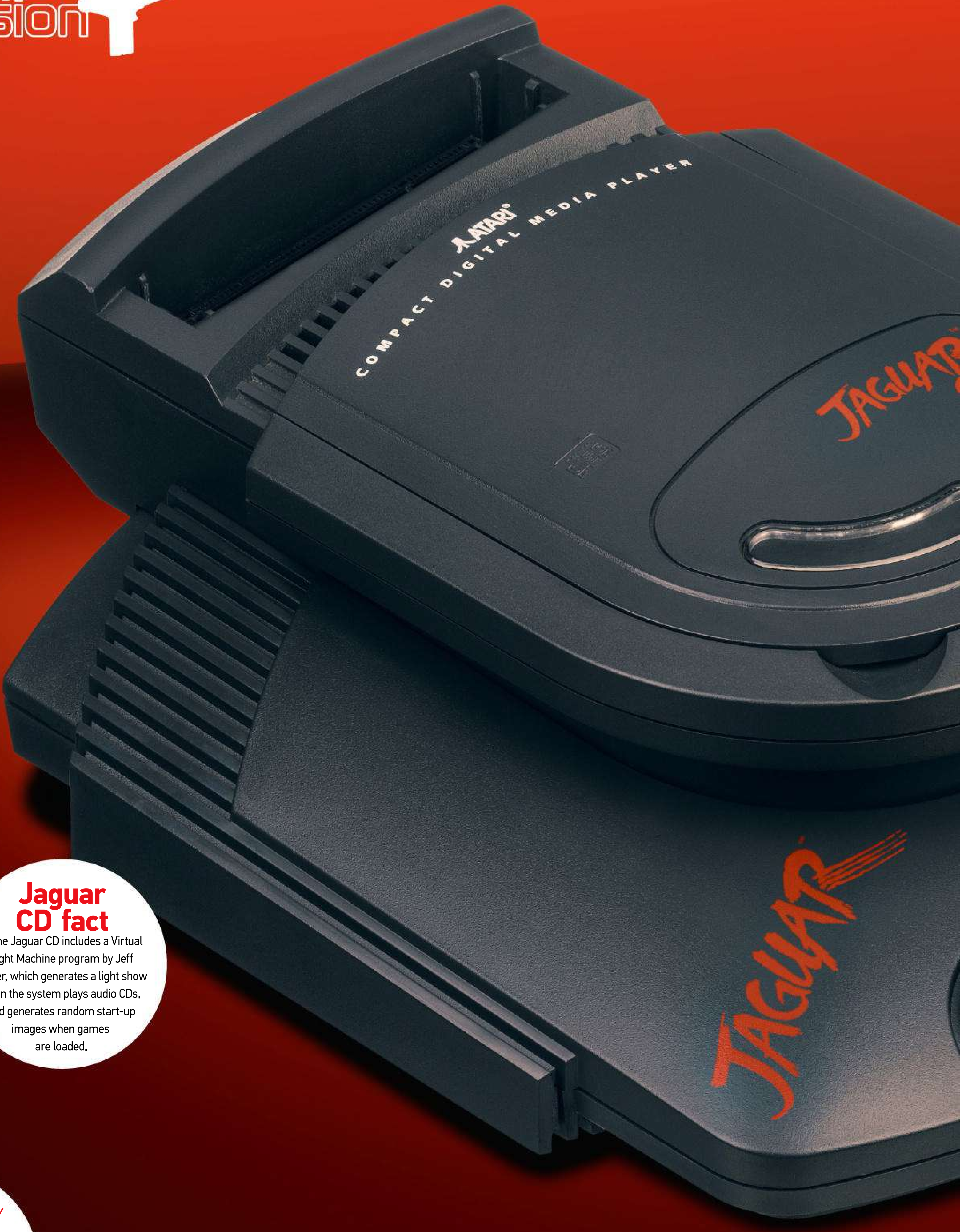


» [PlayStation] *Johnny Bazookatone* was a big hit for Arc on the Sony PlayStation, and was a platformer featuring a hip and trendy musician.



» [Mega Drive] Arc's platform game for Sega consoles was based on a cartoon series about a US soccer team called the Hurricanes.

Peripheral Vision


ATARI
COMPACT DIGITAL MEDIA PLAYER
JAGUAR
JAGUAR

Jaguar CD fact

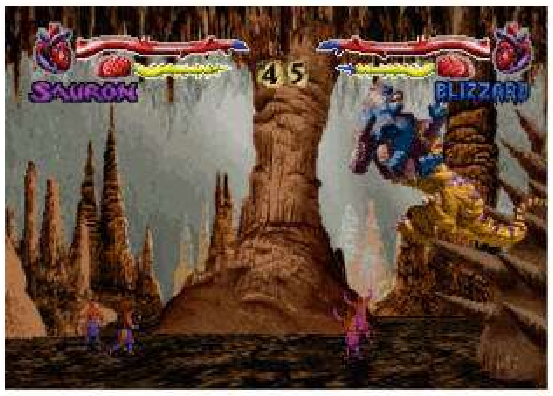
■ The Jaguar CD includes a Virtual Light Machine program by Jeff Minter, which generates a light show when the system plays audio CDs, and generates random start-up images when games are loaded.

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

ESSENTIAL GAME

Primal Rage

Though *Iron Soldier 2* is probably the best overall game on the Jaguar CD, it's also available on cartridge. *Primal Rage* is a true CD exclusive, making it arguably the more essential addition to your library. Despite some lengthy loading times, it looks the part visually and plays quite well, particularly if you have the six button Pro Controller. While there are plenty of other conversions of *Primal Rage* out there this is better than the 16-bit versions and since the only real competition on the Jaguar is *Ultra Vortek*, it's not overshadowed by better fighters as it is on other platforms.



CLOSE HERE
ATARI®
64-BIT INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA SYSTEM

Jaguar CD

» PLATFORM: Jaguar **» RELEASED:** 1995
» COST: £149.99 (launch), £730+ (today, boxed) £410+ (today, unboxed)

While most console manufacturers embraced CD-ROM technology during the mid-Nineties, Atari chose to use cartridges as the Jaguar's primary game media – but it wasn't ignorant to the benefits of optical discs. Indeed, a CD-ROM drive was announced before the system even launched, with a projected release date of winter 1994. The drive would be manufactured by Philips, with a physical design that drew unfortunate comparisons to a toilet, not helped by the pass-through cartridge slot used. It used a non-standard CD format offering 790MB of storage, allowing Jaguar games to offer FMV and higher-quality audio.

However, the add-on was beset by repeated delays and eventually arrived in September 1995, by which time the Jaguar was already on its last legs. Eight additional games joined the launch line-up of *Vid Grid* and *Blue Lightning* by the end of the year, but only one additional game would be released before the system was discontinued in 1996, with two further Telegames releases in 1997. Since then, it has been supported by the homebrew community. Due to its low production run, potentially just 20,000 units, the Jaguar CD is highly prized today – especially since the machine has a reputation for being particularly unreliable. *

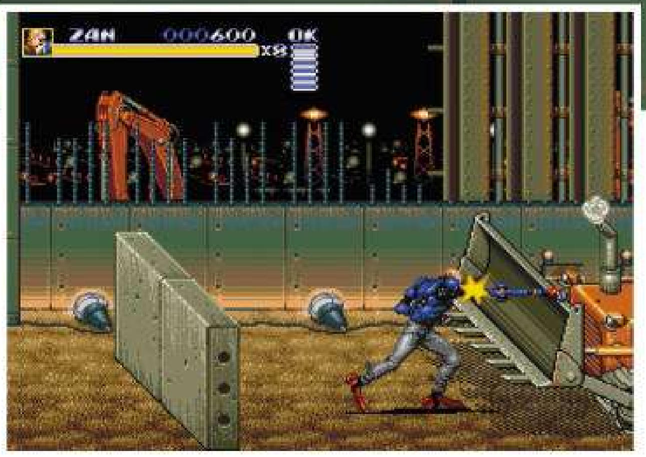
ULTIMATE GUIDE

STREETS OF RAGE 3

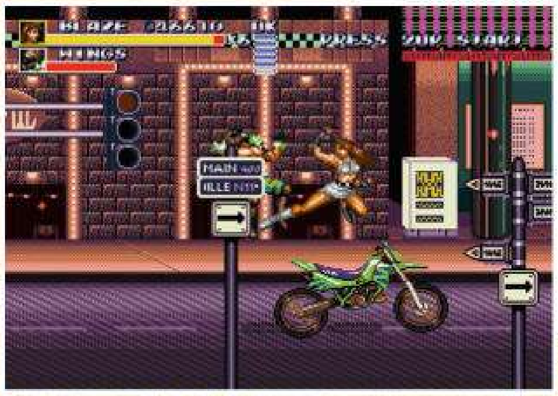
TIGER
DONOVAN

AFTER STRIKING BEAT-'EM-UP GOLD WITH THE SECOND GAME, SEGA DECIDED THAT IT WANTED ANOTHER SEQUEL TO STREETS OF RAGE – BUT IT WASN'T QUITE WHAT EVERYONE EXPECTED. FIND OUT WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, AND WHY YOU SHOULD REVISIT IT TODAY

WORDS BY NICK THORPE



» [Mega Drive] Zan punches the bulldozer to keep it at bay. If you have robot arms, that's probably OK?

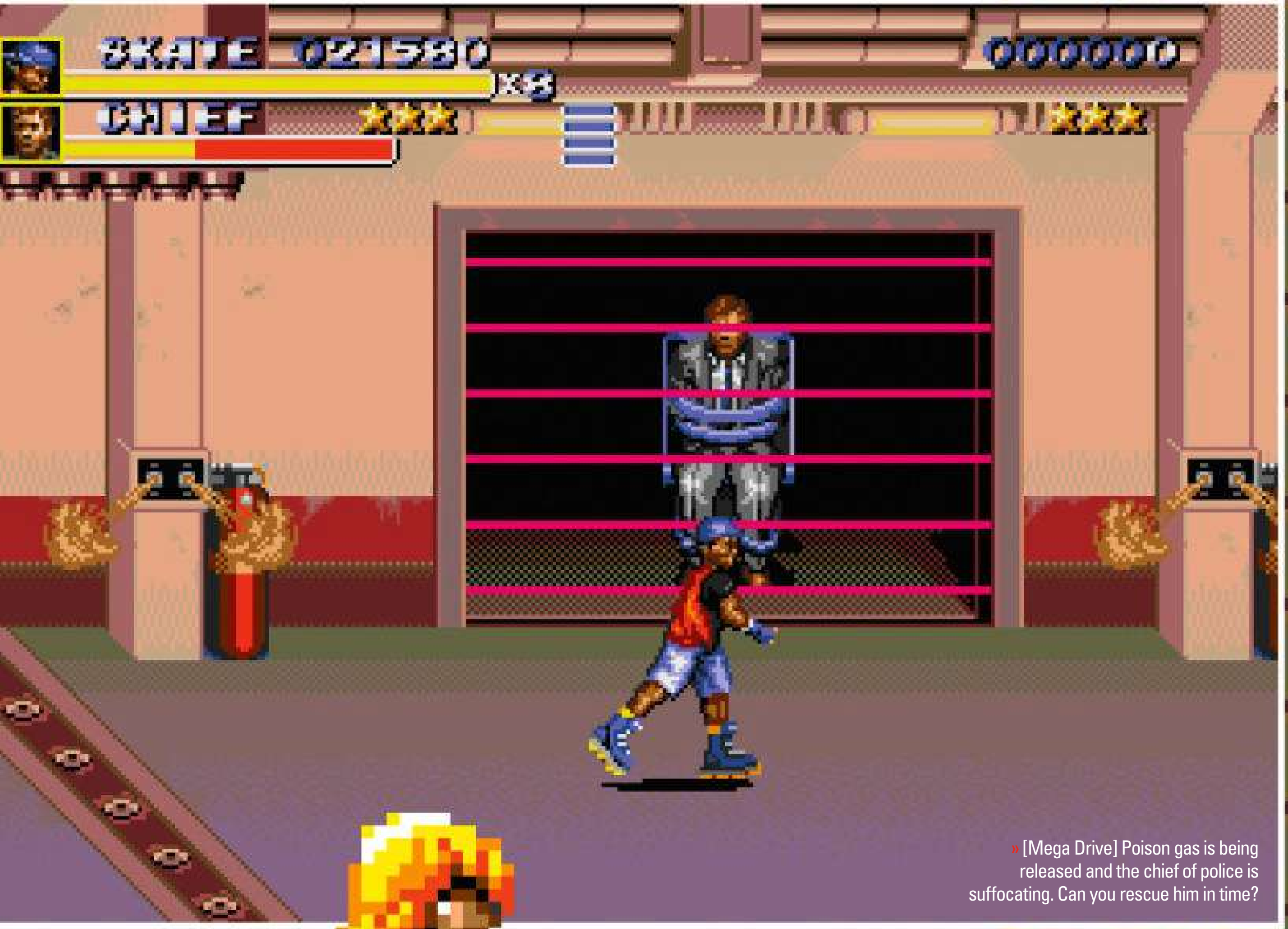


» [Mega Drive] Blaze whacks a baddie off a bike. Unlike the second game, they don't continue on foot.

If you want to spend your evening wandering down the street punching people in the face, without the potential for painful retaliation or legal consequences, the *Streets Of Rage* series offers fine ways to do just that. Of course, some of those ways are more beloved than others – *Streets Of Rage 2* has that irresistible 16-bit charm, *Streets Of Rage 4* has all of the modern bells and whistles, and the ridiculous cop car specials ensure that the original retains some love. But *Streets Of Rage 3*? The received wisdom is that it's the *weird* one. That's the one with the dodgy soundtrack, the one where everyone's wearing the wrong colours and the plot makes no sense. Oh, and it's really expensive too. All of those statements have at least some basis in reality and we'd be silly to pretend otherwise, but to focus exclusively on those aspects of the game would be a disservice to a very good game.

Streets Of Rage 3 brought the series largely back in-house at Sega, where its predecessor had been created primarily by external developers including Ancient, HIC, Shout Design Works and MNM Software. The new plot had Mr X trying to control the city by stealth rather than by force. Having planted a series of bombs around the city to distract authorities, his true goal was to replace key officials with robotic clones under his control. The RoboCy Corporation scientist Dr Zan discovers this plot and alerts Blaze and the gang, who learn that the chief of police is the latest official to disappear and set out to rescue their old boss. Of course, that's the plot we got in the West – see the The Streets Of Japan boxout for more information on the original story.

The team had a 24 megabit cartridge to work with, and set about designing a game that would feature some serious advances over *Streets Of Rage 2.* Some of the more ambitious ideas ultimately had to be dropped – see The Roads Not Taken boxout for more information on that – but there were plenty of upgrades all the same. Most noticeably, the graphics received a great deal ▶



[Mega Drive] Poison gas is being released and the chief of police is suffocating. Can you rescue him in time?

ELECTRA
GARCIA
GOLDIE
DWIGHT

THE STREETS OF JAPAN

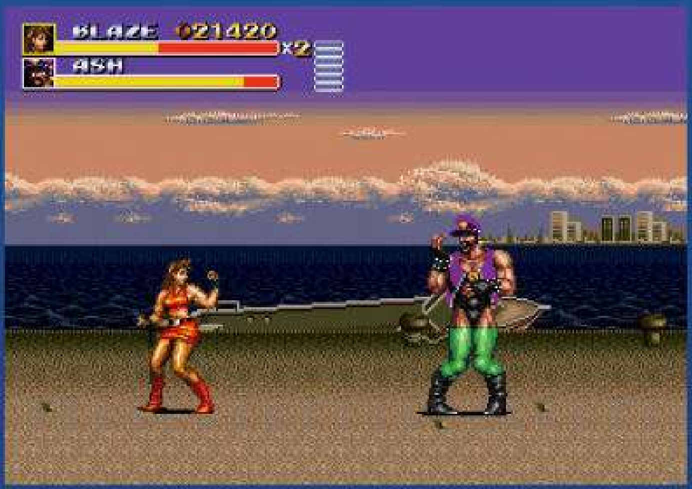
BARE KNUCKLE III HAD SOME KEY DIFFERENCES TO ITS INTERNATIONAL COUNTERPART

The original Japanese version of *Bare Knuckle III* released a few months prior to the version released elsewhere, allowing Sega time to make some changes. You're probably already familiar with a couple of them – most likely the removal of Ash, a distasteful gay stereotype who appeared as a mid-boss in the first stage. You might also be familiar with the changes to the clothing worn by each fighter, and the fact that Sega Of America gave the female enemies new and less revealing outfits.

What you might not be aware of is the fact that the plot was radically altered between the two versions. In the Japanese version, there's no plot to replace city officials. Instead, the Syndicate has stolen a large quantity of a newly discovered element called Rakushin and in the intro, detonates a bomb in Wood Oak City causing 30,000 deaths and 80,000 further injuries. Meanwhile, General Ivan Petrov has been reported missing ahead of his scheduled peace talks at the White House. It transpires that the Syndicate's goal is to spark a war and take advantage of the demand for Rakushin, and Petrov is in the way.

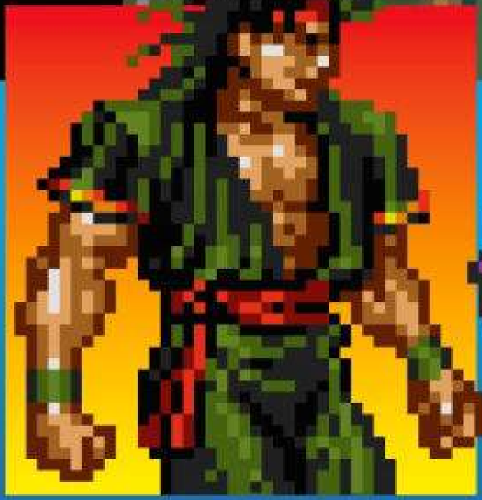
Bare Knuckle III is also generally easier than *Streets Of Rage 3*. All of the difficulties are a step lower than their international counterparts – Japanese normal is the equivalent of easy elsewhere – and the game doesn't cut out after the fifth stage on the easy or very easy modes. Enemies also don't scale their damage based on the difficulty level, unlike in the international versions, and bosses have less health in general. However, the dodge roll's range is shorter, and special attacks drain your health more if not fully charged.

Hardcore fans of the series tend to prefer the Japanese version of the game, and have produced translation patches to allow players to enjoy the original storyline in English.



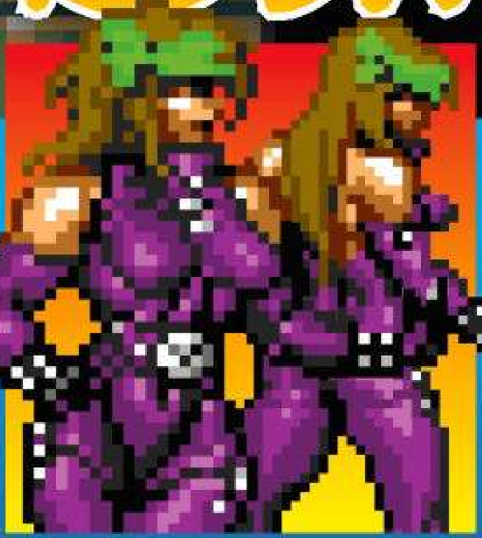
BOSS RUSH

WHO ARE THE BIG BADDIES OF THE SYNDICATE, AND HOW DO THEY FIGHT YOU?



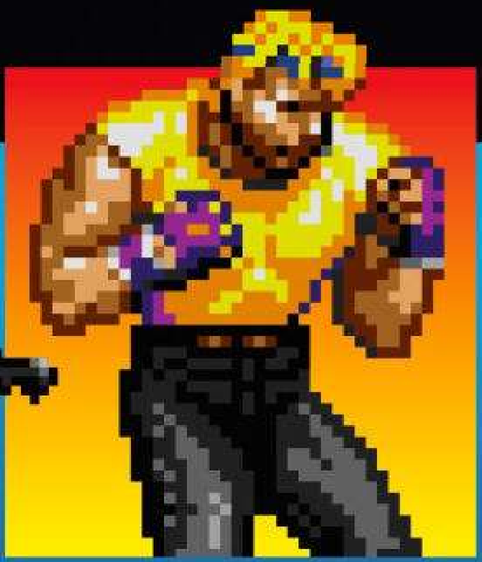
SHIVA

■ Fans of *Streets Of Rage 2* will remember this guy, one of the Syndicate's most irritating enemies. He's not too much of a challenge in the first stage, although he has some nasty jump kicks. However, if you fail to save the hostage in stage six, he'll be your final boss in stage seven.



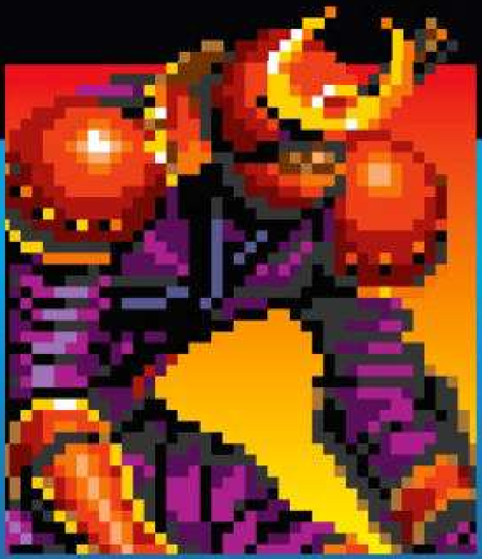
MONA AND LISA

■ Just like in the original *Streets Of Rage*, these twin fighters are a pain to deal with. They jump around all over the place, and can shoot sparks across the floor. If the two of them get close together, they'll generate an even more powerful spark by combining their powers, so watch out.



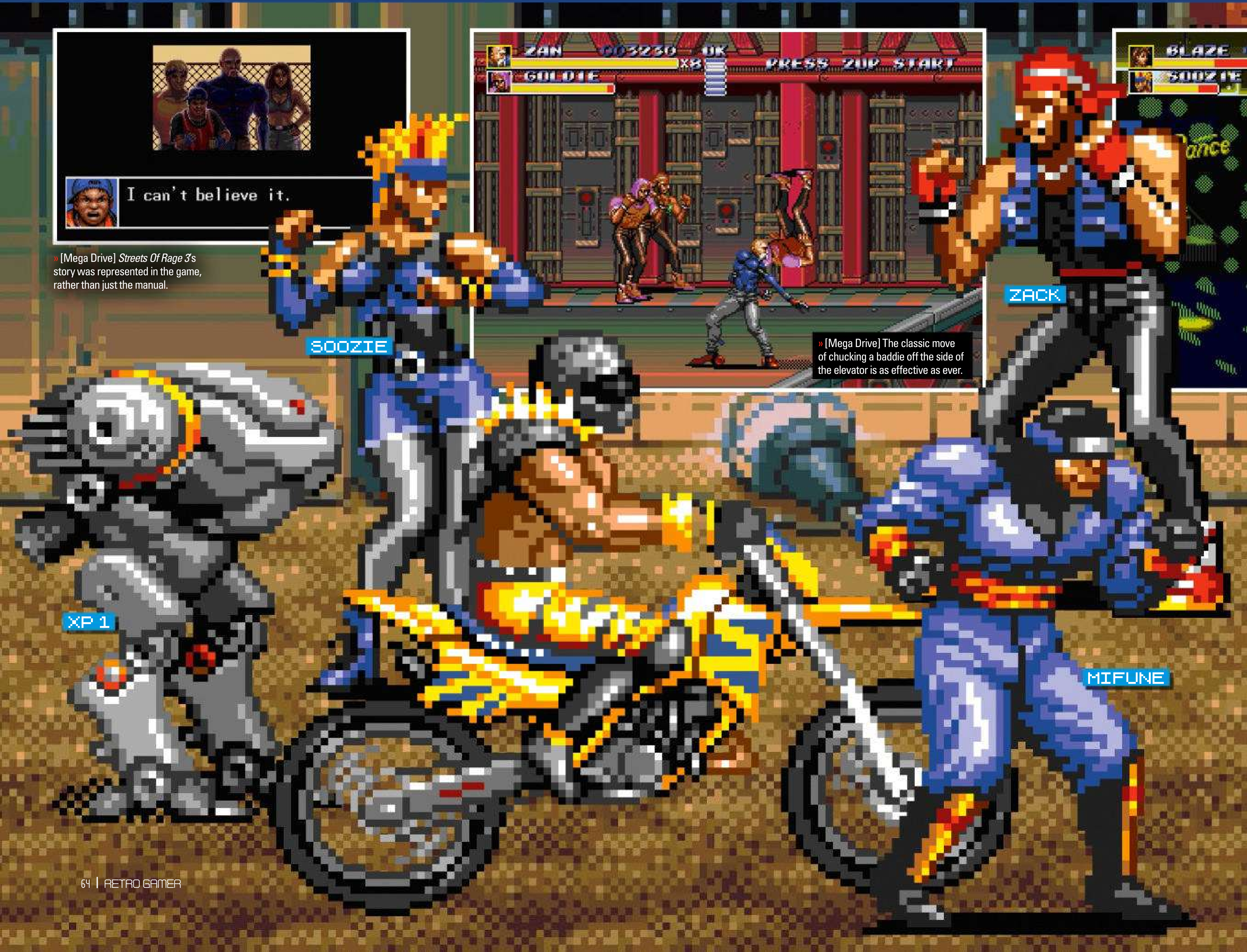
AXEL

■ A shocking heel turn? Nope, it's a robot impostor. He fights using Axel's moves, but can dash about the place in unnaturally quick fashion. If you've got an idea of what you like to use when fighting as Axel, you know exactly which moves to watch out for when fighting this guy.



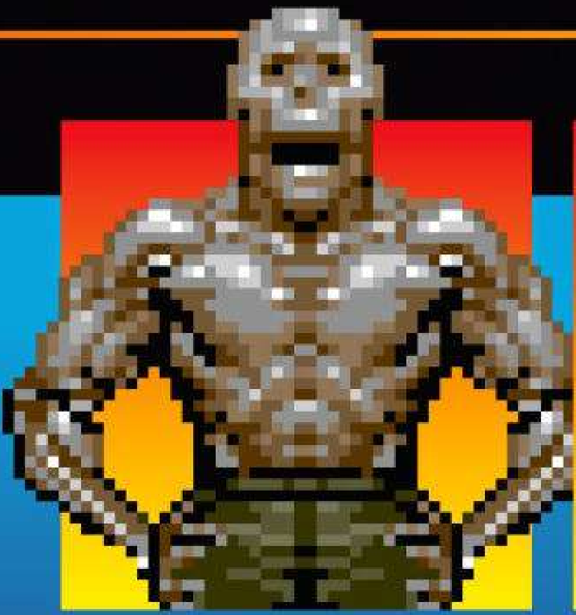
YAMATO

■ There are three of these samurai to fight, and it's a real slog because they all have full boss-size life bars. The first one you fight can teleport, the second one can clone itself for a special attack and the third one can become invisible before it throws shurikens at you.



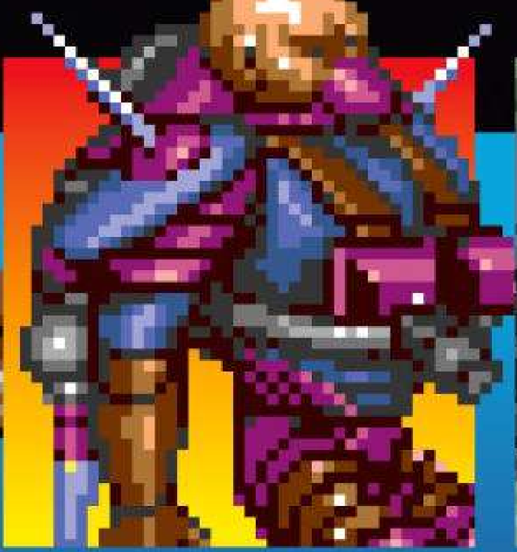
» [Mega Drive] *Streets Of Rage 3*'s story was represented in the game, rather than just the manual.

» [Mega Drive] The classic move of chucking a baddie off the side of the elevator is as effective as ever.



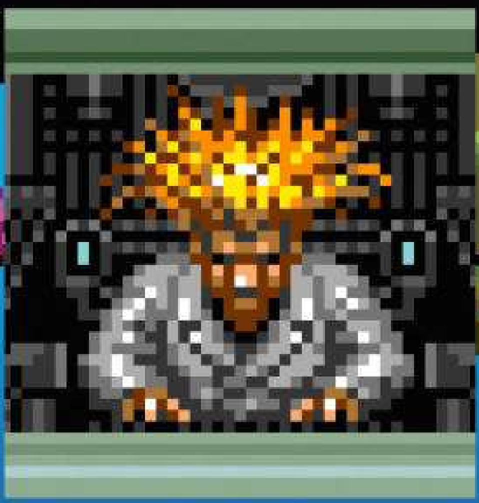
ROBOT X

If you remember the Mr X fight from the end of *Streets Of Rage 2*, this should be familiar to you. The impostor will dart about the screen trying to shoot you, which doesn't feel particularly fair. What feels even worse is when it starts to fire homing missiles at you. At least they're slow.



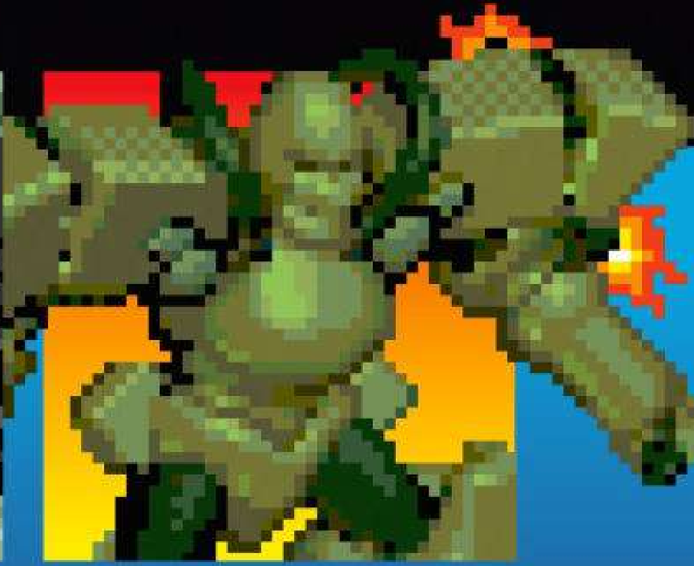
JET

Like his namesake from *Streets Of Rage 2*, Jet will fly about the screen and ascend into the air before dropping down to attack you. Unlike that fight, things are significantly complicated by the addition of numerous Rocket enemies, which have similar attack patterns to Jet.



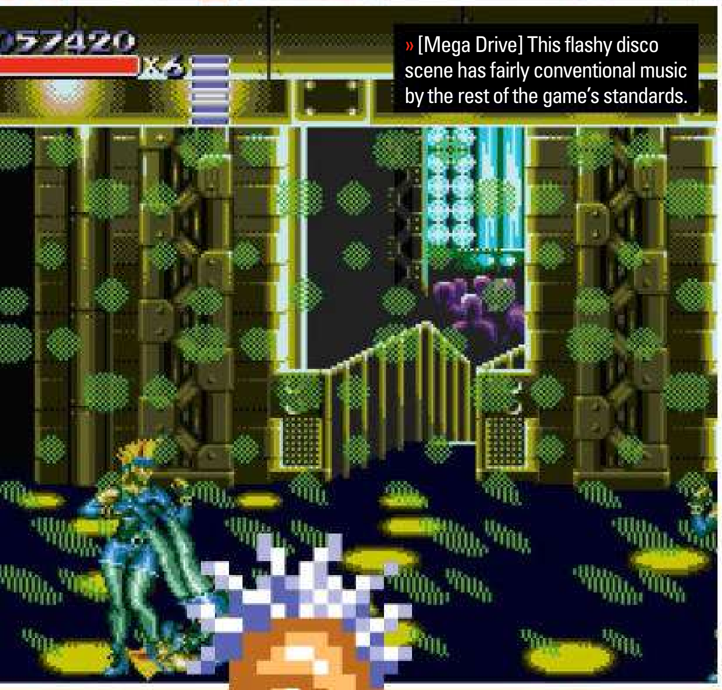
DR DAHM

This coward won't attack you himself, and hides away in a control room operating a big robotic arm. Since you're also on a conveyor belt, it's quite tricky to avoid the vertical attacks. Once you've done enough damage to the arm, it'll become electrified and more dangerous.



ROBOT Y

Controlled by the remnants of Mr X – his brain in a jar – this robot will fly around and try a mixture of close-range punches and kicks, leaping hammer blows and missile blasts. The big struggle here is the three-minute time limit, as you've got to beat the clock for the best ending.



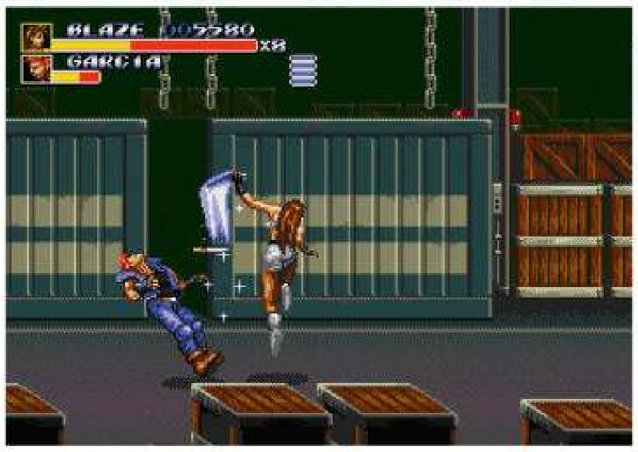
» [Mega Drive] This flashy disco scene has fairly conventional music by the rest of the game's standards.

of attention with more detailed backgrounds, larger and better animated sprites as well as a greater variety of enemies. More story scenes were included, and new non-linear elements were included – the fifth and sixth stages have alternative routes, and your actions in the sixth will determine which version of the seventh stage you progress to, as well as your ultimate ending.

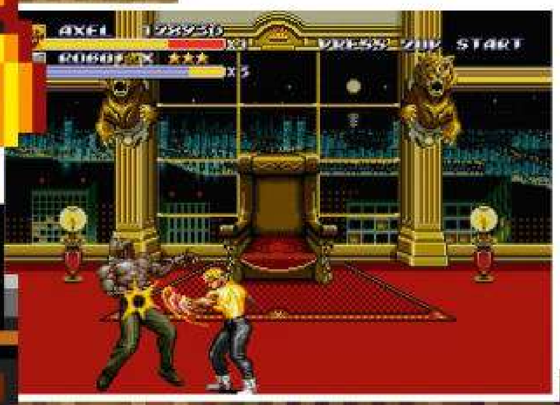
The combat was given a number of tweaks and refinements too. Axel, Blaze and Skate returned, with hulking wrestler Max giving way to the cyborg Zan, who packed some truly electrifying attacks. There's even an unlockable kangaroo called Roo. Each fighter gained new movement options including dash attacks and evasive rolls, and special moves no longer drained your life bar if you waited for the gauge at the top of the screen to recharge. Each character's Blitz moves could also be upgraded by earning plenty of points, or accessed using special button inputs. For balance, weapons were made far less durable than they had been in previous games, but each character also had access to new weapon-enhanced Blitz and special attacks. Hazards like bottomless pits also returned, and there were even new hazards like rail cars and a relentless bulldozer to contend with. The refinements are all small things, but they do add up to give the game a faster, more exciting feel.

Of course, we can't talk about a *Streets Of Rage* game without mentioning the music. Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima returned as composers after their acclaimed work on the previous game, but this time Koshiro's approach to the soundtrack changed dramatically. He set up an automated composing system, which would generate randomised loops of notes that he could incorporate into the music, resulting in a more experimental and harder sound. You can definitely hear that in tracks like *Crazy Train* and *Inga Rasen*, with Kawashima's tracks such as *Fuze* and The *Poets I* being slightly more on the conventional side. In a 2014 interview with Red Bull Music Academy, Koshiro mentioned that the soundtrack "took a bad beating from listeners at the time", and it is rather divisive – some feel that it deserves praise for being forward-thinking, others have written it off as "unlistenable".

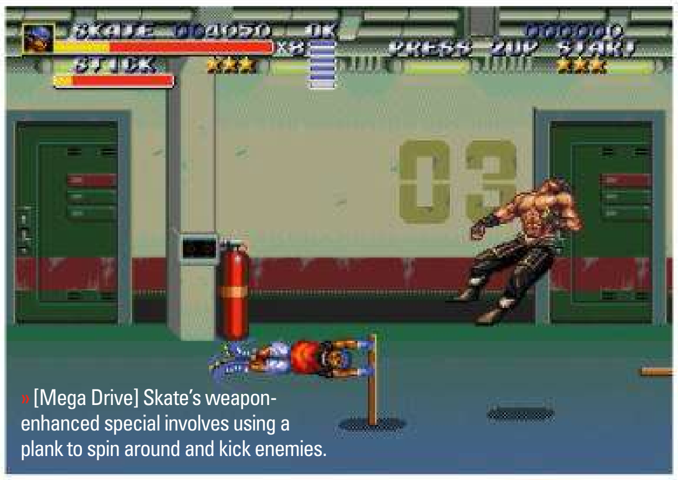
Streets Of Rage 3 arrived in Japan in March 1994 under the name *Bare Knuckle III*, and most UK publications reviewed this version. *Mean Machines Sega* awarded the game 83%, feeling that while it "looks and plays great" the game was "marred by exceptional easiness" and that the 24 megabit cartridge was an example of Sega "putting vastly more in, and only getting slight improvements for it". It scored 72% in *Mega*, with the "supercharged" gameplay not enough to overcome "a lack of originality and challenge".



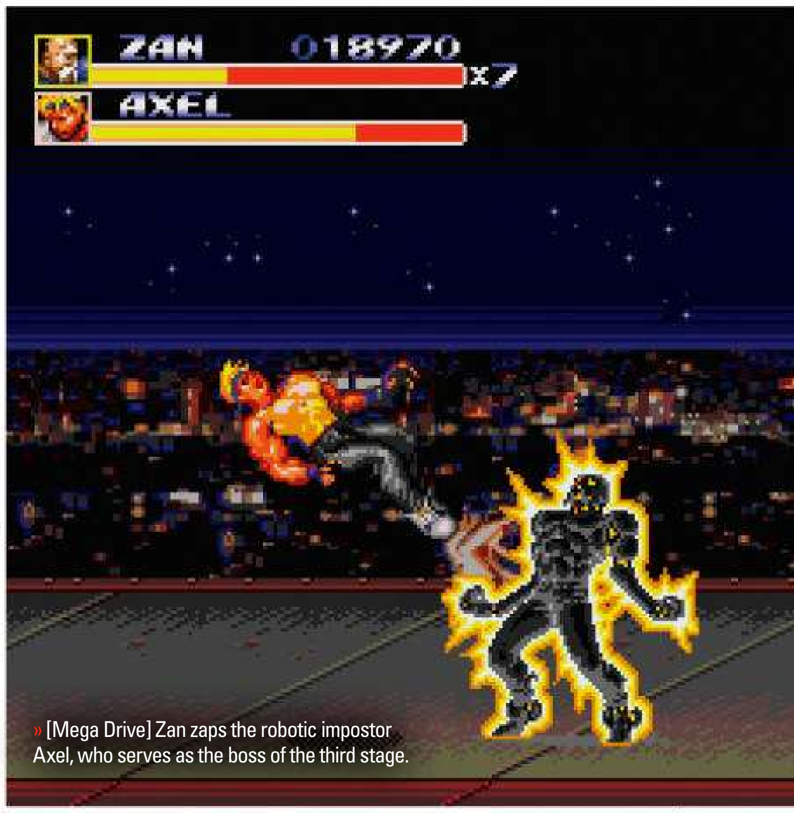
» [Mega Drive] Blaze demonstrates a knife-assisted Blitz attack, a new move for this game.



» [Mega Drive] It's just like the end of *Streets Of Rage 2* – except now Mr X is a robot.



» [Mega Drive] Skate's weapon-enhanced special involves using a plank to spin around and kick enemies.

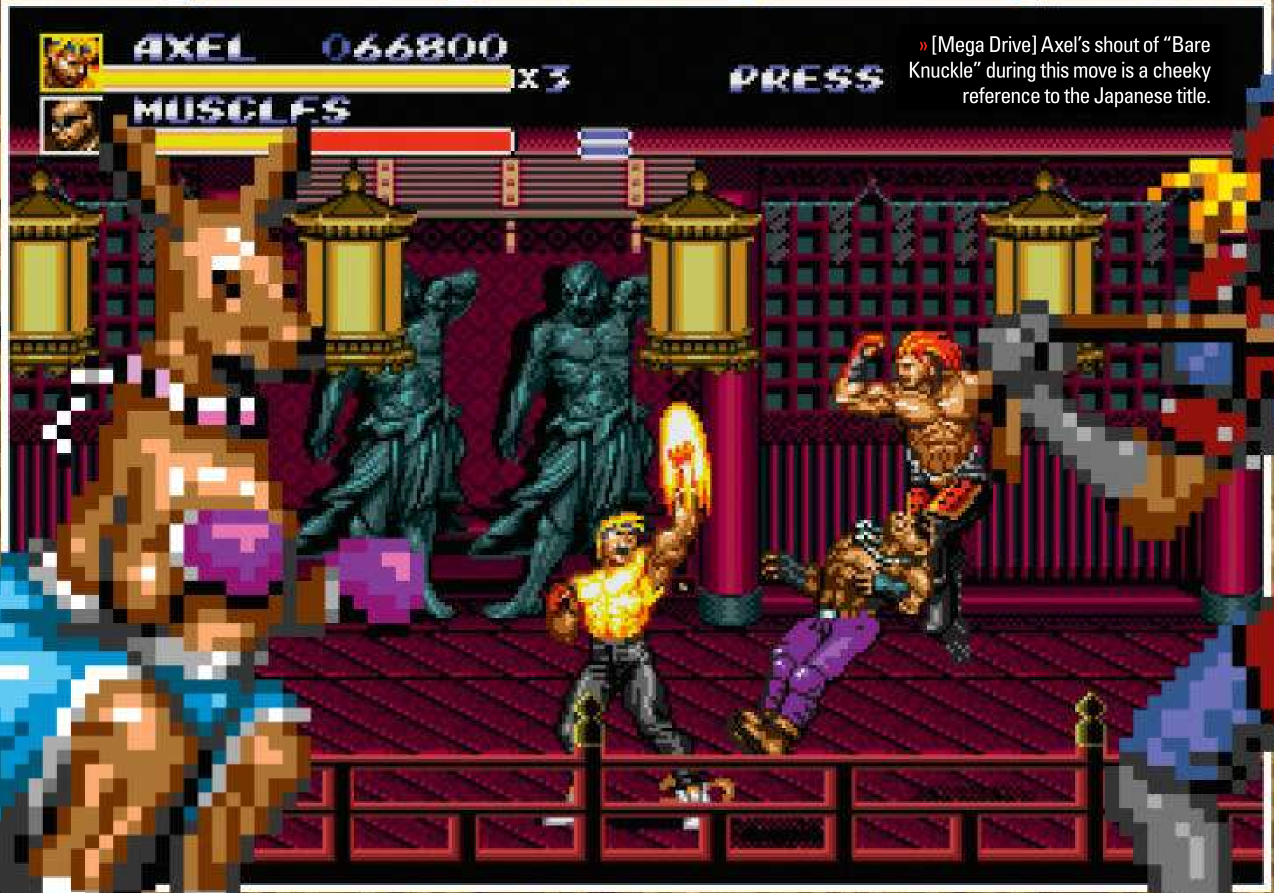


» [Mega Drive] Zan zaps the robotic impostor Axel, who serves as the boss of the third stage.

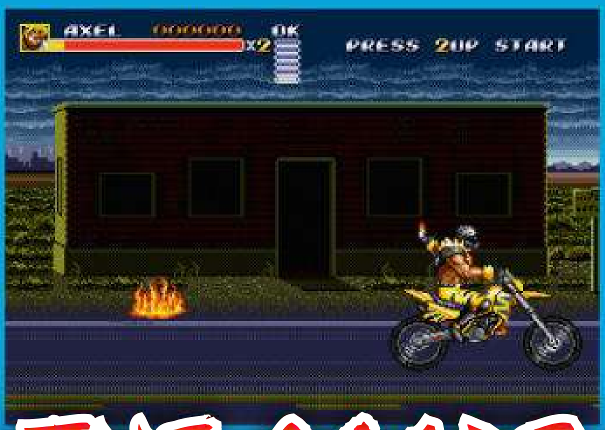
Following some localisation tweaks, the game launched in North America and Europe in June 1994. The UK's official *Sega Magazine* praised an almost complete version as "the fastest and most playable progressive combat game ever" in a 90% review, though advised readers "If you can't afford the £59.99 for *Rage 3*, get *Rage 2*". *Digitiser* noted that it "plays like a dream", but complained about "tuneless, wobbly" sound and that the game was completed on normal difficulty at the second attempt, and gave a score of 75%.

Perhaps inevitably, due to its high price and mixed reviews, *Streets Of Rage 3* was not as popular as its predecessors. As a result the game is rarer and more expensive today – when complete with box and manual, original copies seldom go for less than £100, regardless of which regional release you're looking to buy. Fortunately, it has been regularly reissued in retro compilations, with the first time being as an unlockable extra in Japanese copies of *Sonic Gems Collection* for the PS2 and GameCube. On Xbox 360 and PS3, you can get it physically in *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* or digitally in *Sega Vintage Collection: Streets Of Rage*. It can also be found in *Sega Mega Drive Classics* for PS4, Xbox One and Switch, with the Japanese version available as an added bonus, and it is still available to PC gamers via Steam.

Some games are diminished by the passage of time, but *Streets Of Rage 3* has actually benefitted. Nobody ever denied that it played well, but the problems people had in 1994 just don't seem like problems today. Where the similarity to its predecessor was once seen as a weakness, today it's a hallmark of quality in a genre that isn't as active as it used to be. There's no need to worry about value for money, either – though cartridges remain expensive, those who just want to play the game can do it for under £1. And hey, some of you will even get a kick out of the soundtrack. So while there are plenty of players who already swear by it, if you skipped *Streets Of Rage 3* in the mid-Nineties, there's never been a better time to go back and see what you missed out on. There's nothing revolutionary about it, but it's a fine evolution of a classic beat-'em-up. ✱



» [Mega Drive] Axel's shout of "Bare Knuckle" during this move is a cheeky reference to the Japanese title.



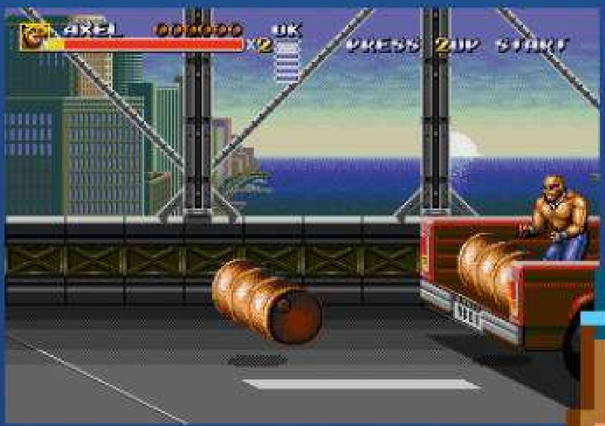
THE ROADS NOT TAKEN

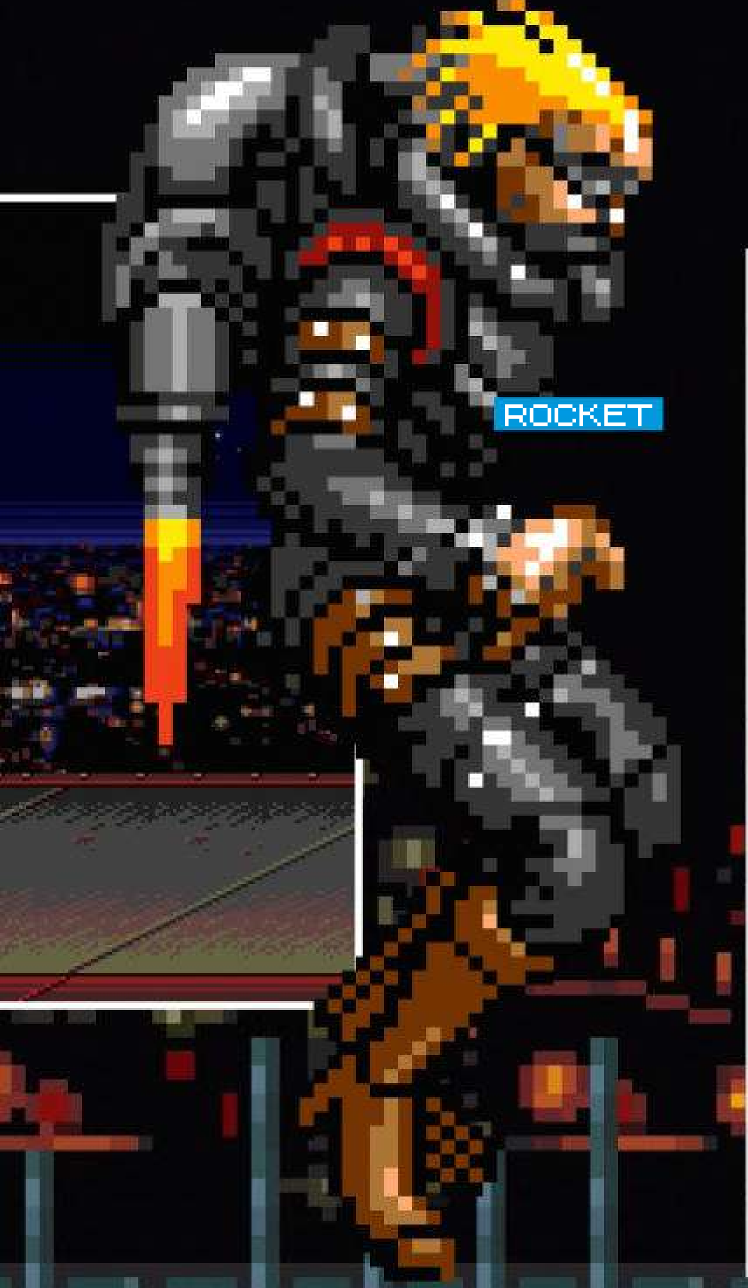
SCRAPPED SECTIONS HINT AT GREATER AMBITIONS FOR STREETS OF RAGE 3

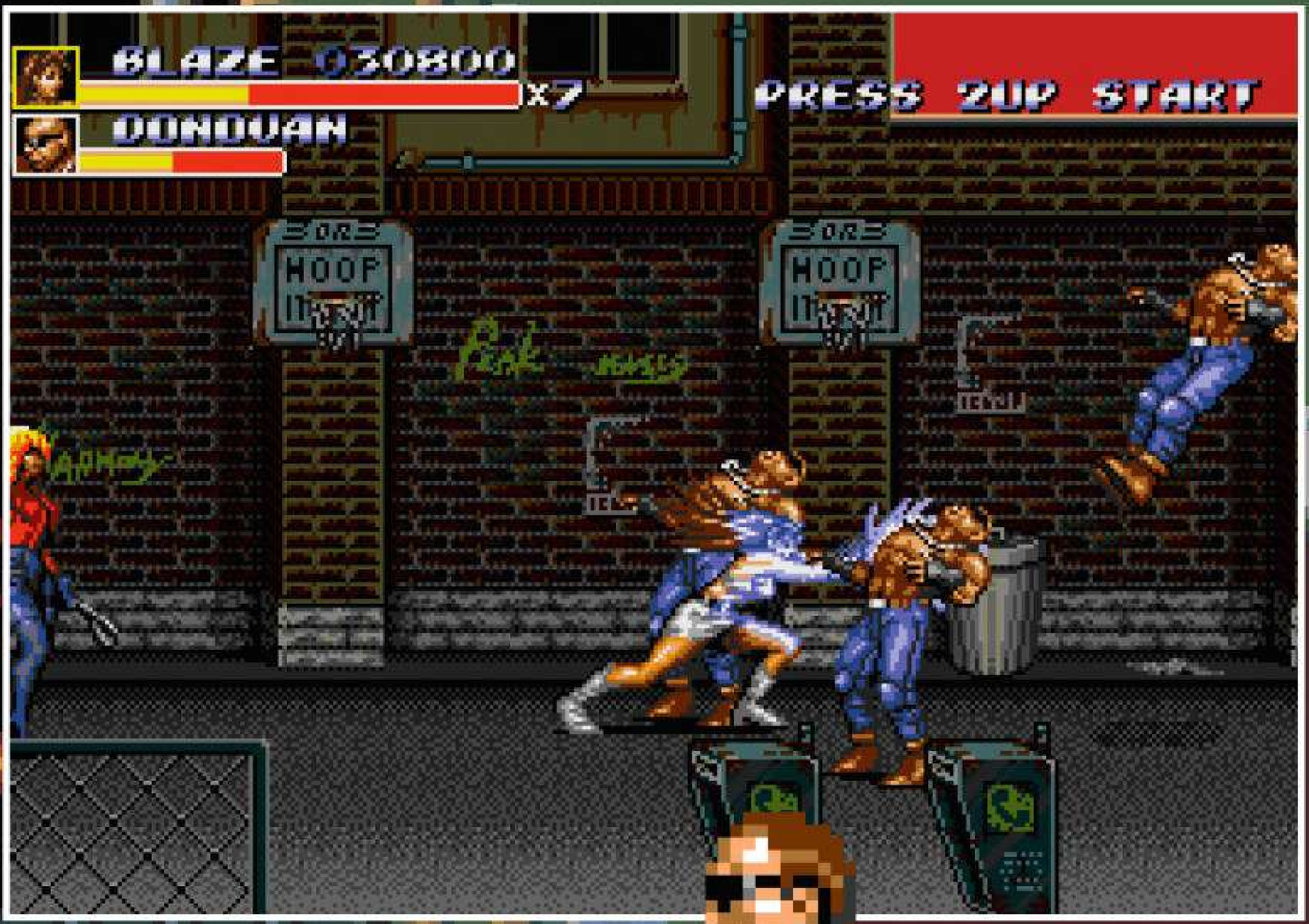
Though *Streets Of Rage 3* introduced a fair few tweaks to the formula of the previous games, there was at least one radical change under consideration – the inclusion of brand-new vehicle stages. These would have seen Axel and the gang take to the road on motorbikes, dodging enemy attacks and ramming enemies off the road. At least three such stages are known to have been in development. The first and most mysterious is an urban street stage, which has only ever been seen in prerelease screenshots, but the other two were actually fairly far along in development.

One took place in a wasteland area en route to the Syndicate hideout, with Storm enemies throwing molotov cocktails. The other took place on a bridge prior to the White House/City Hall stage, and had a Donovan throwing oil drums and knives at you from the back of a truck. Completed graphics and some coding for these stages exists within the Japanese version of the game, and enterprising modders have produced restorations of these stages. Interestingly, the Australian magazine *Hyper* actually highlighted these stages in its review of the game, including a screenshot of the bridge stage. The reviewer "detested" them, noting that the bikes "move forward, side to side and can ram other bikes (to little effect)" and that the gameplay "gets boring after about three seconds". This may hint at the reason they fell victim to the editor's scissors.

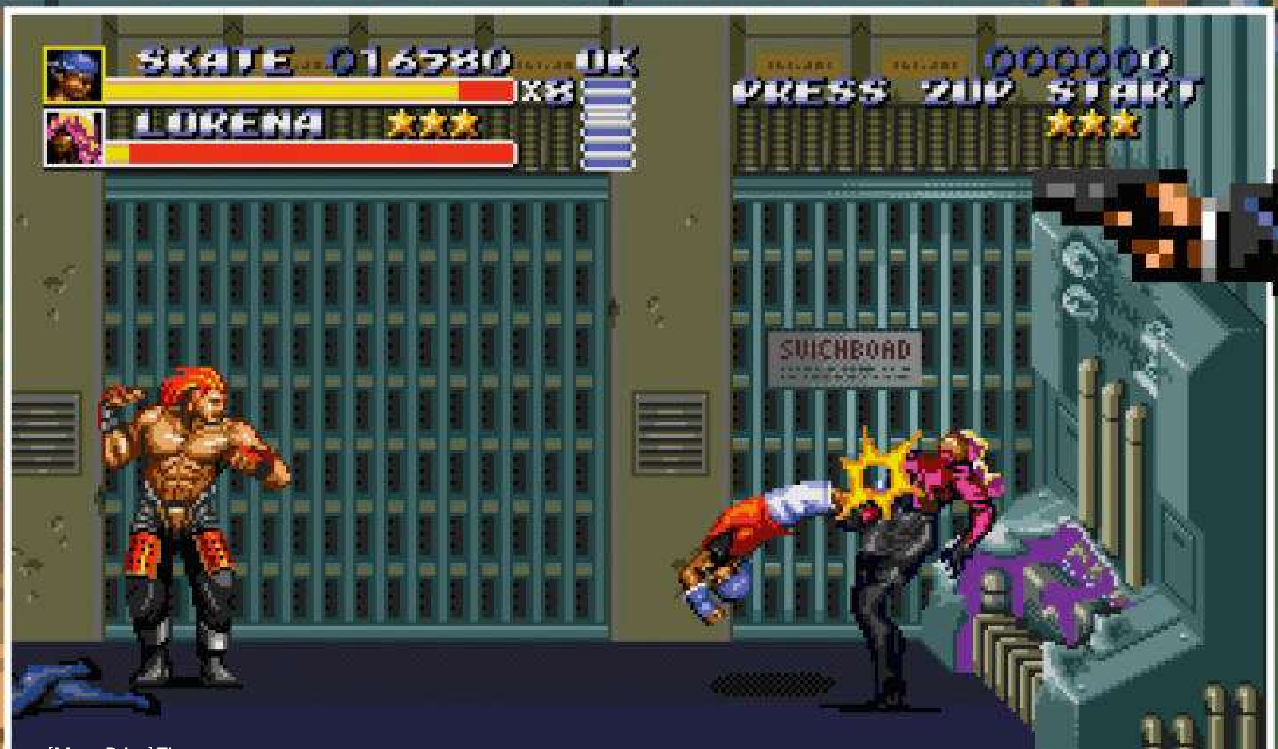
Additionally, the sixth stage actually has a far larger map than you are ordinarily allowed to explore. There is a completely unused fourth floor, as well as blocked sections on the other floors including an exit door. There's no known reason for these changes, though if we had to guess, we'd imagine they were intended to simplify the stage.



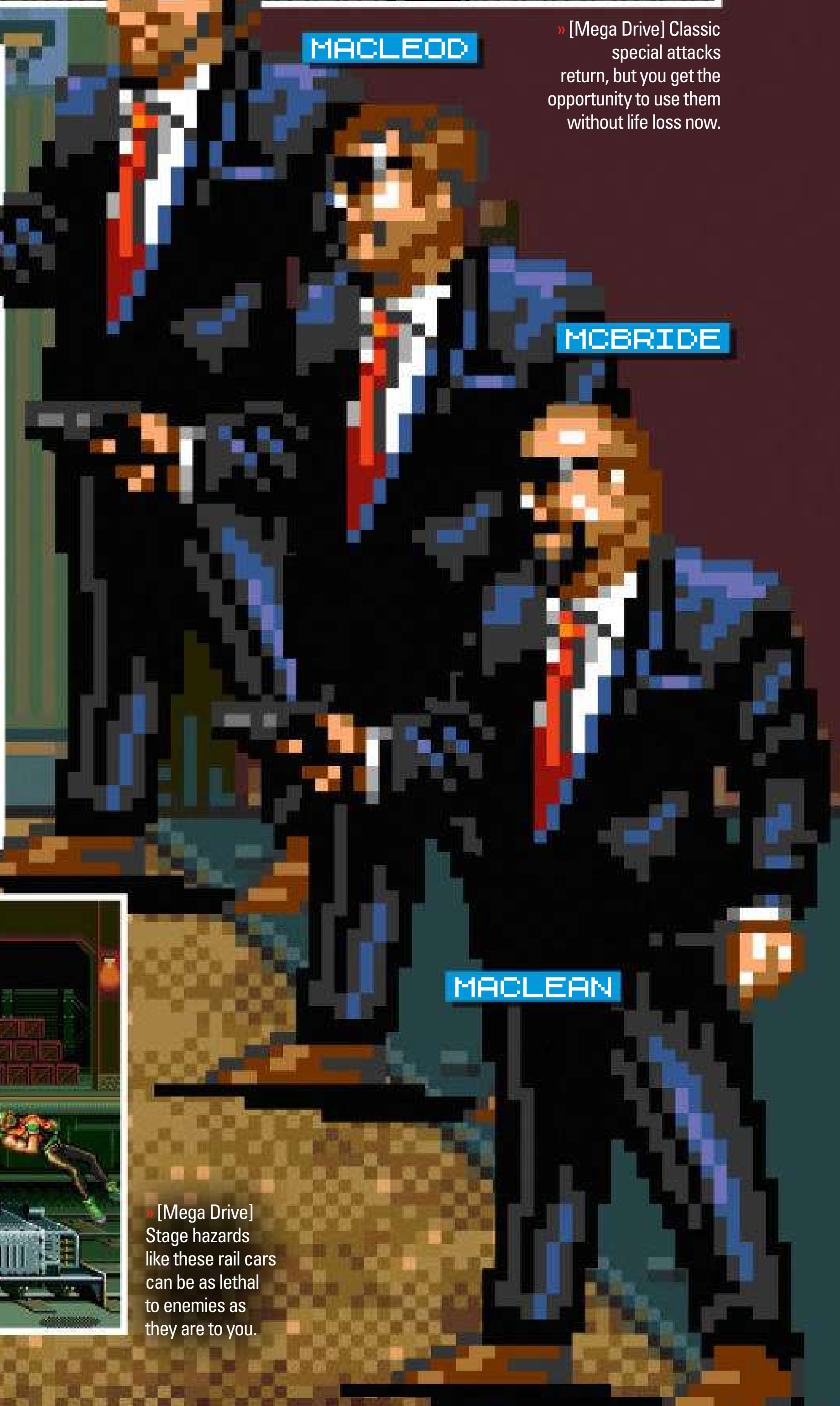


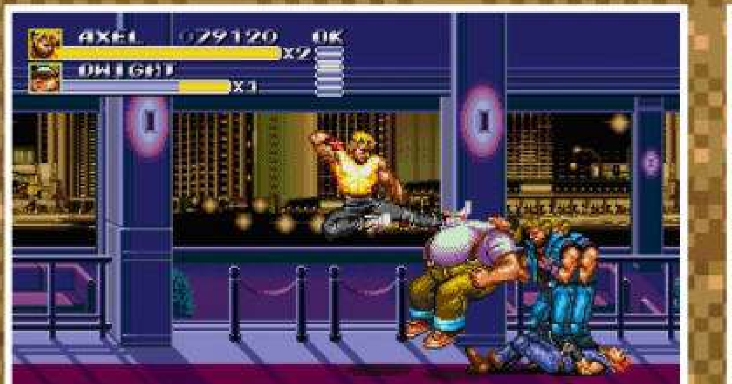

BLAZE 030800
x7
DONOVAN
PRESS 2UP START
HOOP

» [Mega Drive] Classic special attacks return, but you get the opportunity to use them without life loss now.

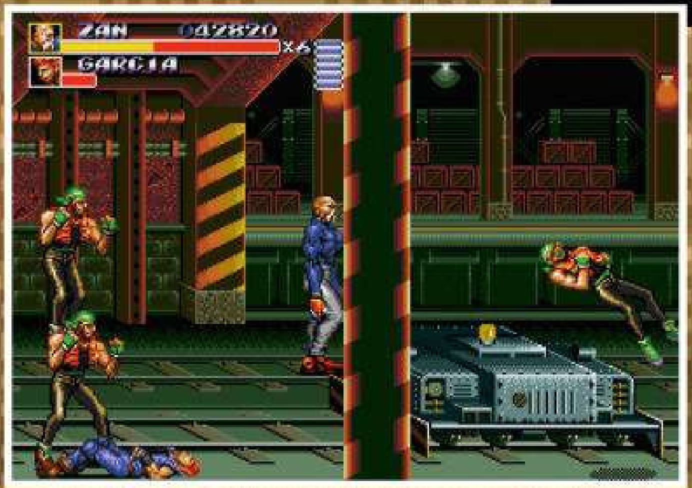

SKATE 016780 OK
x8
LORENA
000000
PRESS 2UP START
SWITCHBOARD

» [Mega Drive] The non-linear sixth stage involves finding and smashing these switch boxes.


MACLEOD
MCBRIDE
MACLEAN

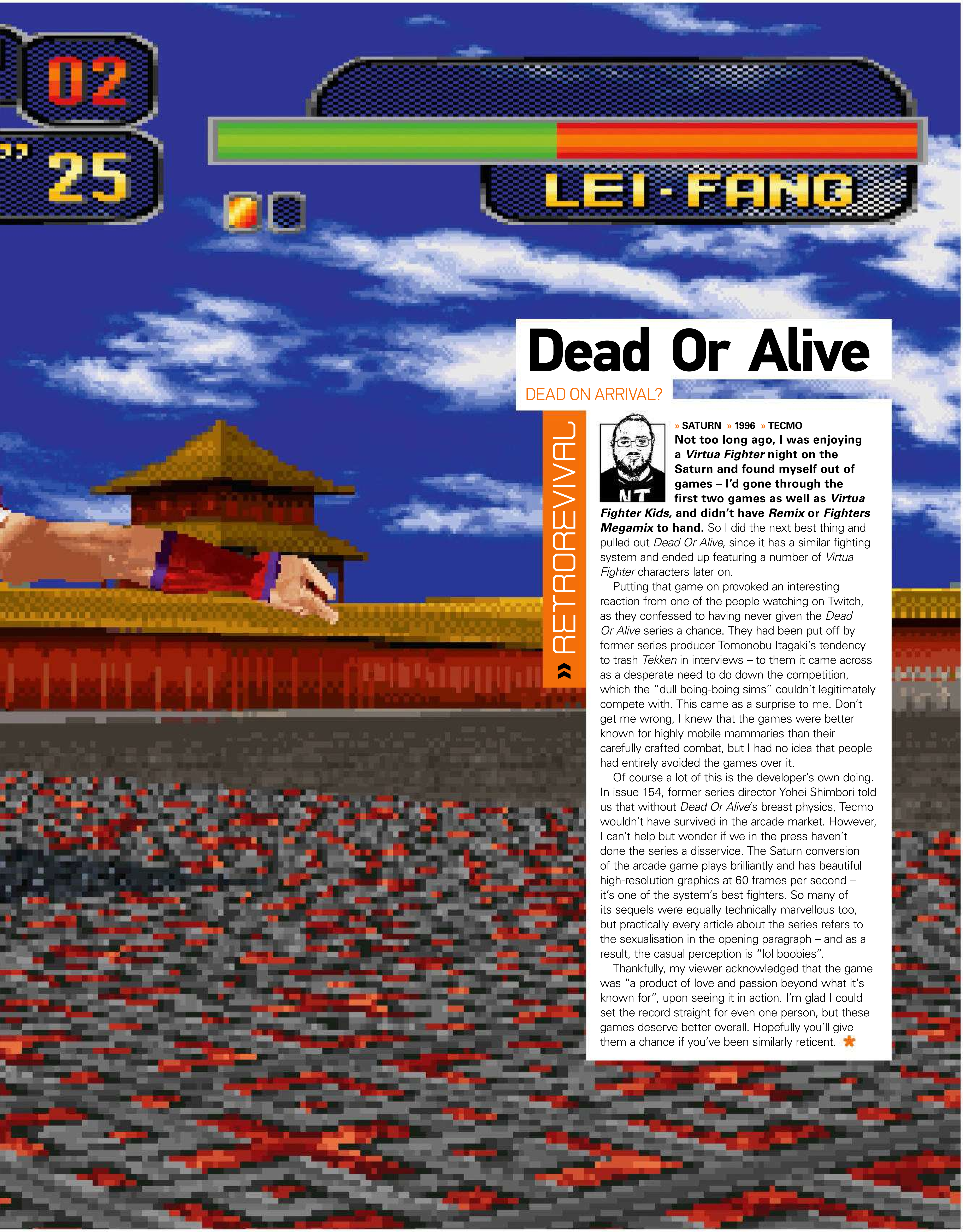

AXEL 029120 OK
x2
DWIGHT
x1

» [Mega Drive] It's better to kick the big lads – if you try to throw them, they'll squash you.


ZAN 042820
x6
GARCIA

» [Mega Drive] Stage hazards like these rail cars can be as lethal to enemies as they are to you.

JANN-LEE
ROUND
20



Dead Or Alive

DEAD ON ARRIVAL?

» SATURN » 1996 » TECMO

Not too long ago, I was enjoying a *Virtua Fighter* night on the Saturn and found myself out of games – I'd gone through the first two games as well as *Virtua Fighter Kids*, and didn't have *Remix* or *Fighters Megamix* to hand. So I did the next best thing and pulled out *Dead Or Alive*, since it has a similar fighting system and ended up featuring a number of *Virtua Fighter* characters later on.

Putting that game on provoked an interesting reaction from one of the people watching on Twitch, as they confessed to having never given the *Dead Or Alive* series a chance. They had been put off by former series producer Tomonobu Itagaki's tendency to trash *Tekken* in interviews – to them it came across as a desperate need to do down the competition, which the "dull boing-boing sims" couldn't legitimately compete with. This came as a surprise to me. Don't get me wrong, I knew that the games were better known for highly mobile mammaries than their carefully crafted combat, but I had no idea that people had entirely avoided the games over it.

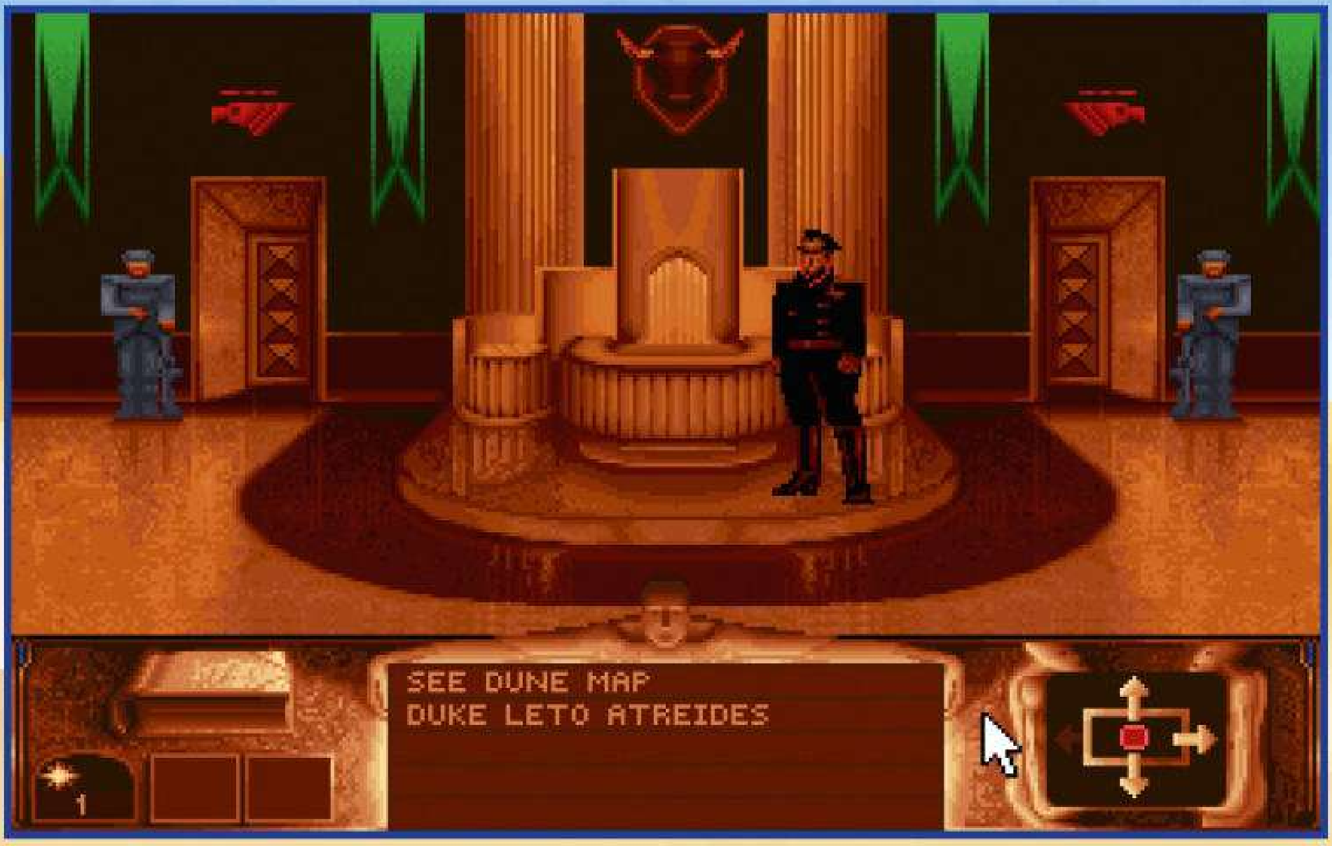
Of course a lot of this is the developer's own doing. In issue 154, former series director Yohei Shimbori told us that without *Dead Or Alive*'s breast physics, Tecmo wouldn't have survived in the arcade market. However, I can't help but wonder if we in the press haven't done the series a disservice. The Saturn conversion of the arcade game plays brilliantly and has beautiful high-resolution graphics at 60 frames per second – it's one of the system's best fighters. So many of its sequels were equally technically marvellous too, but practically every article about the series refers to the sexualisation in the opening paragraph – and as a result, the casual perception is "lol boobies".

Thankfully, my viewer acknowledged that the game was "a product of love and passion beyond what it's known for", upon seeing it in action. I'm glad I could set the record straight for even one person, but these games deserve better overall. Hopefully you'll give them a chance if you've been similarly reticent. *

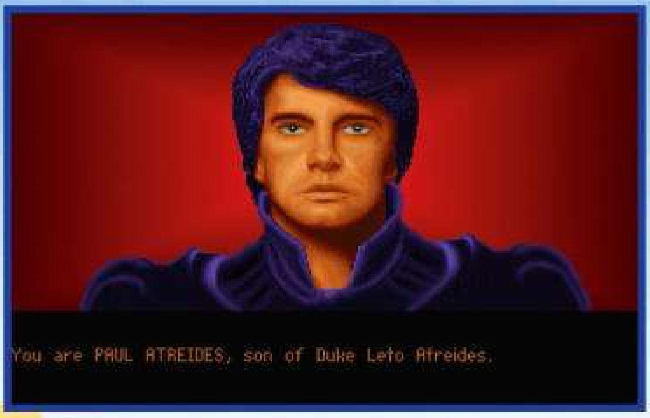
THE HISTORY OF DUNE

With Frank Herbert's iconic sci-fi world brought to the forefront once again, we explore the impact that the Dune universe has had within videogames with the creators that brought the sandy planet of Arrakis away from the silver screen and over to an interactive space

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES



» [PC] The adventure side of Cryo's game meant there were a lot of visually appealing screens to explore while interacting with *Dune*'s characters.



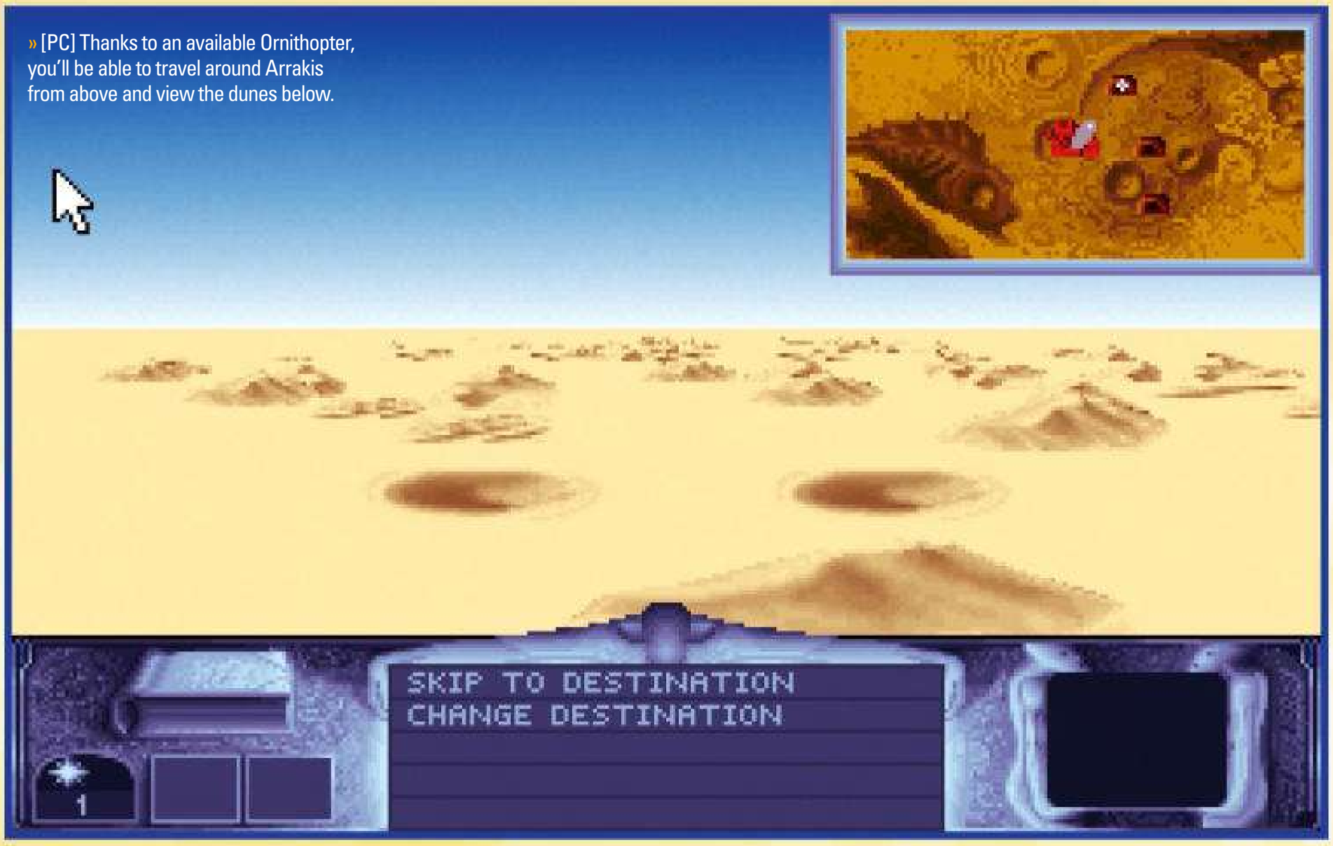
You are PAUL ATREIDES, son of Duke Leto Atreides.

» [PC] Though the original *Dune* game was based on the novel rather than the David Lynch movie, there were some visual 'influences' that came over.

Dune is once again on our minds. The silver screen has been rocked by the latest rendition of Frank Herbert's visually rich sci-fi novels, and both fans and newcomers to its universe are praising Denis Villeneuve's stylistic representation of a world that means so much to so many. It's one of those book adaptations that constantly finds it way back into the public eye, and we're all for it. But while fans of the books typically have the films or miniseries for their imaginations to be realised, gamers have had a different understanding of *Dune*'s complex sci-fi story.

Of course, at this point anyone reading this magazine likely already has some awareness of just how important *Dune* has been for gaming. While there have been a decent number of *Dune* games, the history of strategy games – and in particular real-time strategy – owes an incredible amount to Frank Herbert's warring world of Arrakis. If not for the novels' overarching focus on the battle for resources and its Great Spice War, then perhaps there never would have been a discussion at Westwood that ultimately led to *Dune II* and, through that, the game that would forge the foundation of the RTS genre as we would go on to know it.

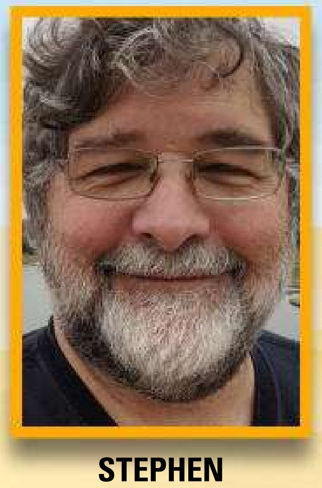
Frank Herbert's rich fantasy series primarily made its way to its new interactive space thanks to Virgin Interactive, which was pushing hard to continue its expansion into the videogame industry and was looking for suitable licences to secure. Martin Alper, who had founded Mastertronic (that later went on to become Virgin Interactive), had adored the *Dune* books and was curious about turning its world into a



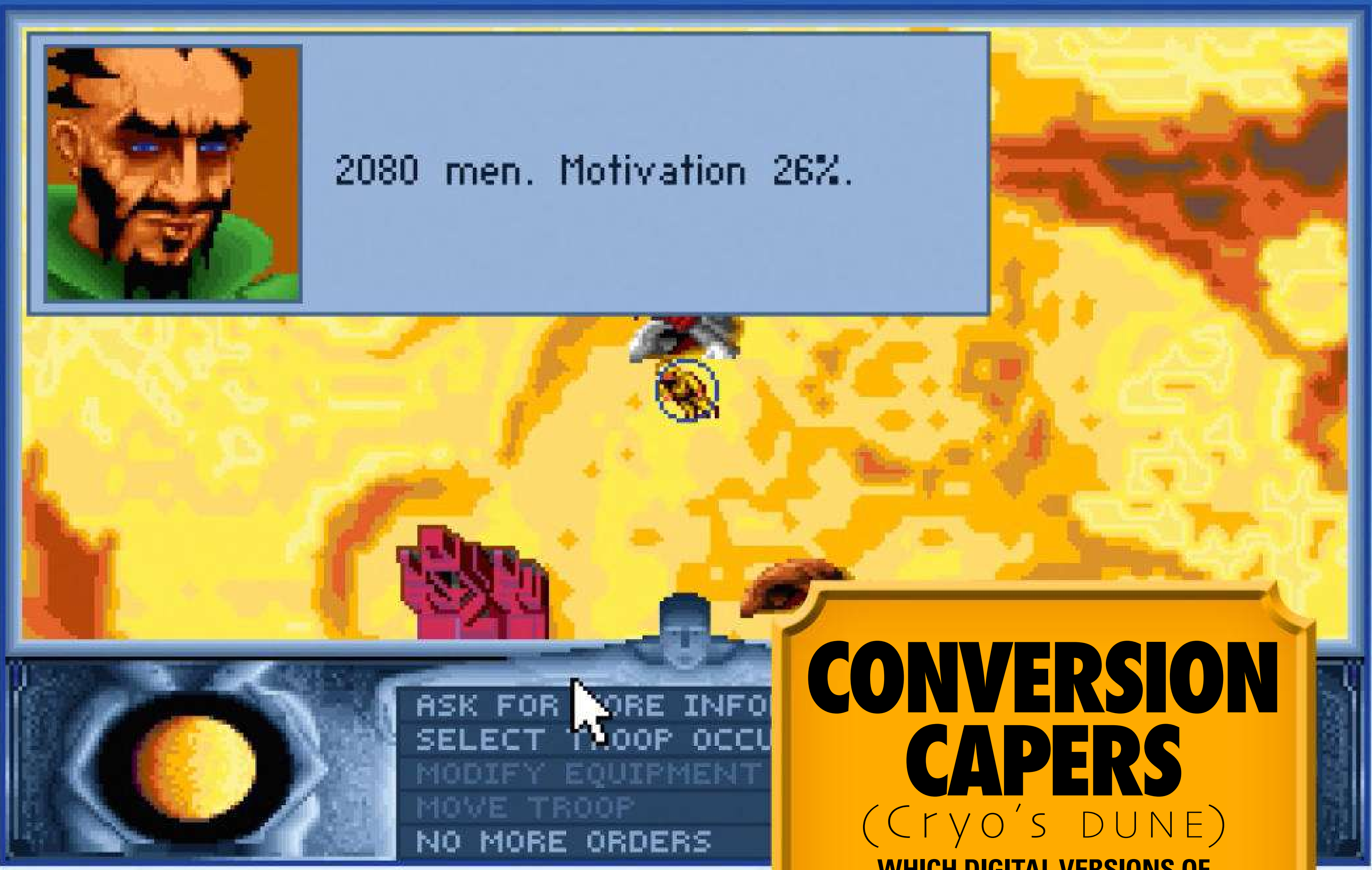
» [PC] Thanks to an available Ornithopter, you'll be able to travel around Arrakis from above and view the dunes below.

LOUIS CASTLE

MATTHEW STIBBE



STEPHEN CLARKE-WILLSON



2080 men. Motivation 26%.

» [PC] Though the strategy component of *Dune* was tacked on at the end, it still added an interesting twist to the game.

> "WHEN I JOINED VIRGIN, MARTIN HAD ALREADY LICENSED DUNE ALONG WITH RIGHTS TO A VIDEO CLIP OF VIRGINIA MADSEN FROM THE MOVIE"
>
> **STEPHEN CLARKE-WILLSON**

videogame. It wasn't an easy task however, largely due to the then-recent death of Frank Herbert and the fact that the adaptation rights were obscured behind numerous film production companies. Martin persevered however and was eventually able to secure the rights for a game version of *Dune*, meaning production could begin. "When I joined Virgin, Martin had already licensed *Dune* along with rights to a video clip of Virginia Madsen from the movie," explains Stephen Clarke-Willson, adding that at this point, "the UK office had started development of the *Dune* game." This early preproduction was inspired of course by the novels, but equally by the David Lynch movie that was released in 1984.

Stephen adds that at the time, "There was an emphasis on chasing Sierra Online's adventure game business [within Virgin]. So *Dune* was pitched mostly as an adventure game. You can see that in the first half or so of the game." French studio Cryo Interactive ultimately got involved with the project, and through that shaped some impressive visuals to match the stylistic qualities of the David Lynch movie. The focus on adventure was still there, but it eventually became clear that the project was just taking too long. Stephen had joined Virgin as a producer since the company was having issues as "nobody was finishing their games", so his role was to rein the various development teams in and ensure things were kept on track. "I called up each developer – they were almost all out of money – and asked them if they would politely switch to a milestone basis," recalls Stephen. "Nobody had to agree to this change but they all did." This was also true of the *Dune* project, but through this process it became apparent that progress had "stalled" and as a result Virgin decided to cancel the project.

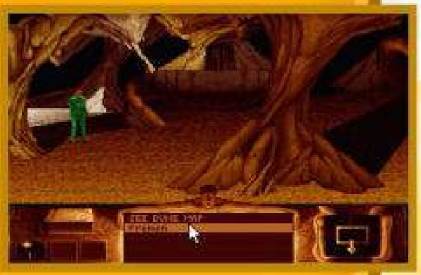
Eager to ensure that a solid *Dune* game might still make it to market, Martin had in the meantime reached out to Westwood to see if it had any interest in working on the licence. "Brett [Sperry, Westwood cofounder] was very excited because *Dune* was his favourite novel and we all liked the imagery from the film," explains Louis Castle, cofounder of Westwood. "Virgin was very happy with Westwood's progress on the first *Kyrandia* game so we were given full creative freedom to pitch a game based on the *Dune* film. Brett worked with lead programmer Joe Bostic on the game concept and I worked with Ren Olson on the visual style for the game. We pitched Virgin and got the green light. Brett and Joe wanted to do a strategy game and we wanted to have more visual

CONVERSION CAPERS

(Cryo's DUNE)

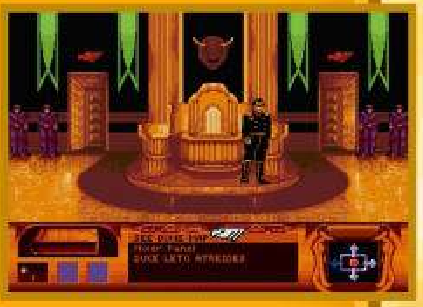
WHICH DIGITAL VERSIONS OF ARRAKIS ARE WORTH REVISITING?

DOS



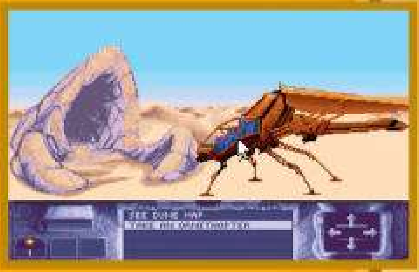
There was a big push internally from Cryo Entertainment's side to move exclusively to a CD format for *Dune*, which meant higher quality visuals, audio and everything in between. Due to this, there weren't very many platforms at the time that the DOS game could be ported to. For us, it's the best version by far.

SEGA CD



While there was a necessary devolution in terms of visuals for the Sega CD version and aspects such as navigating the open world are a little more limited, it's still a solid rendition of the DOS version. Thankfully, the lack of the mouse support is less frustrating than it could have been.

AMIGA



Pretty much a like-for-like copy of the DOS game, which isn't surprising considering their similarities. The truth is that numerous other versions had been planned – even for the likes of the Master System – but they didn't make the cut. The Amiga version is housed on three disks.

EVOLVING A GENRE

HOW DUNE II GAVE BIRTH TO THE RTS…

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Whether it's spice, tiberium, construction materials or gold, RTS games are always about collecting and then efficiently spending resources. Defending your resource collectors obviously becomes a big part of the game, except for *Total Annihilation*, which innovated by removing any kind of 'harvester'.

MOUSE CONTROLS

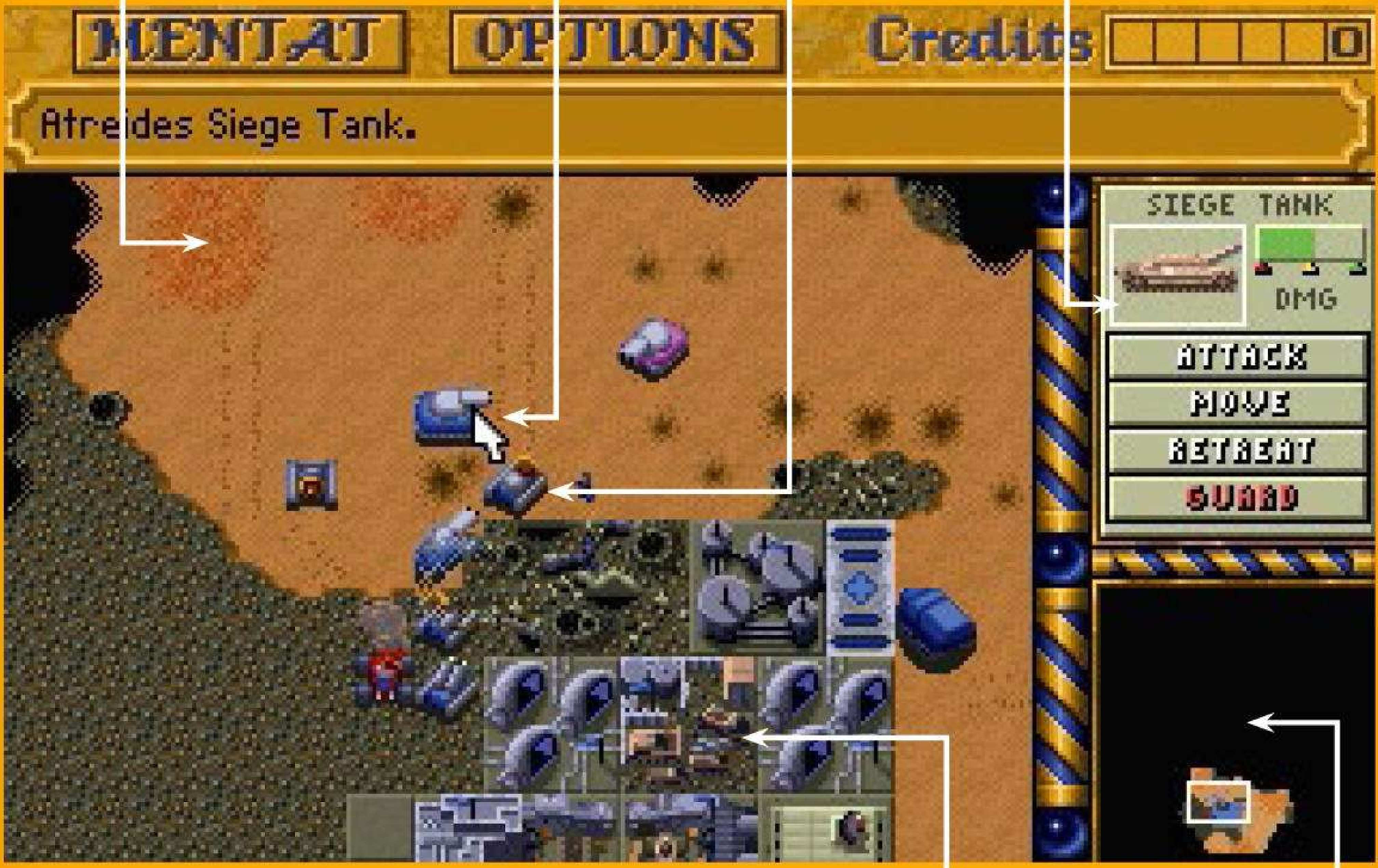
Easily the most important innovation that Westwood brought with *Dune II* was the move to mouse controls, and while these weren't context-based as they would go on to be in every RTS game ever, it still was a huge game changer in the speed and efficiency of play.

UNIQUE UNITS

While some RTS games take this more seriously than others, having units or distinct abilities for each faction helps to create different play styles for each faction and through that empower players to have favourites. It also means that knowing your enemy is important so you'll know how to counter it, which *StarCraft* is now famous for.

TECH TREES

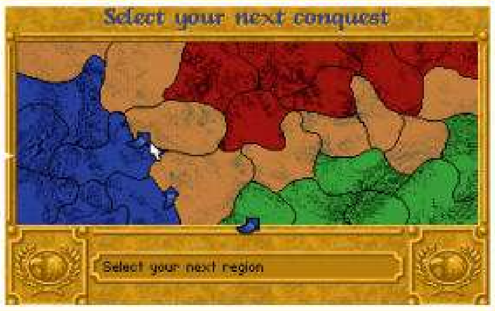
Newly constructed buildings mean access to more powerful units, upgrades or further construction options. This is where a lot of the pressure comes from when playing an RTS online, since knowing the 'right' route and what options you have is critical. *Age Of Empires* and *Warcraft* specifically leant in hard on upgrade tech trees.



Atreides Siege Tank.

CONQUEST MAP

Making progress through an RTS is often presented as a military campaign, with a map view of the progress being made. Some games, even Intelligent Games' *Dune* game, *Emperor*, went on to make these choices about which mission to undertake even have an effect on the mission and gameplay.



Select your next conquest

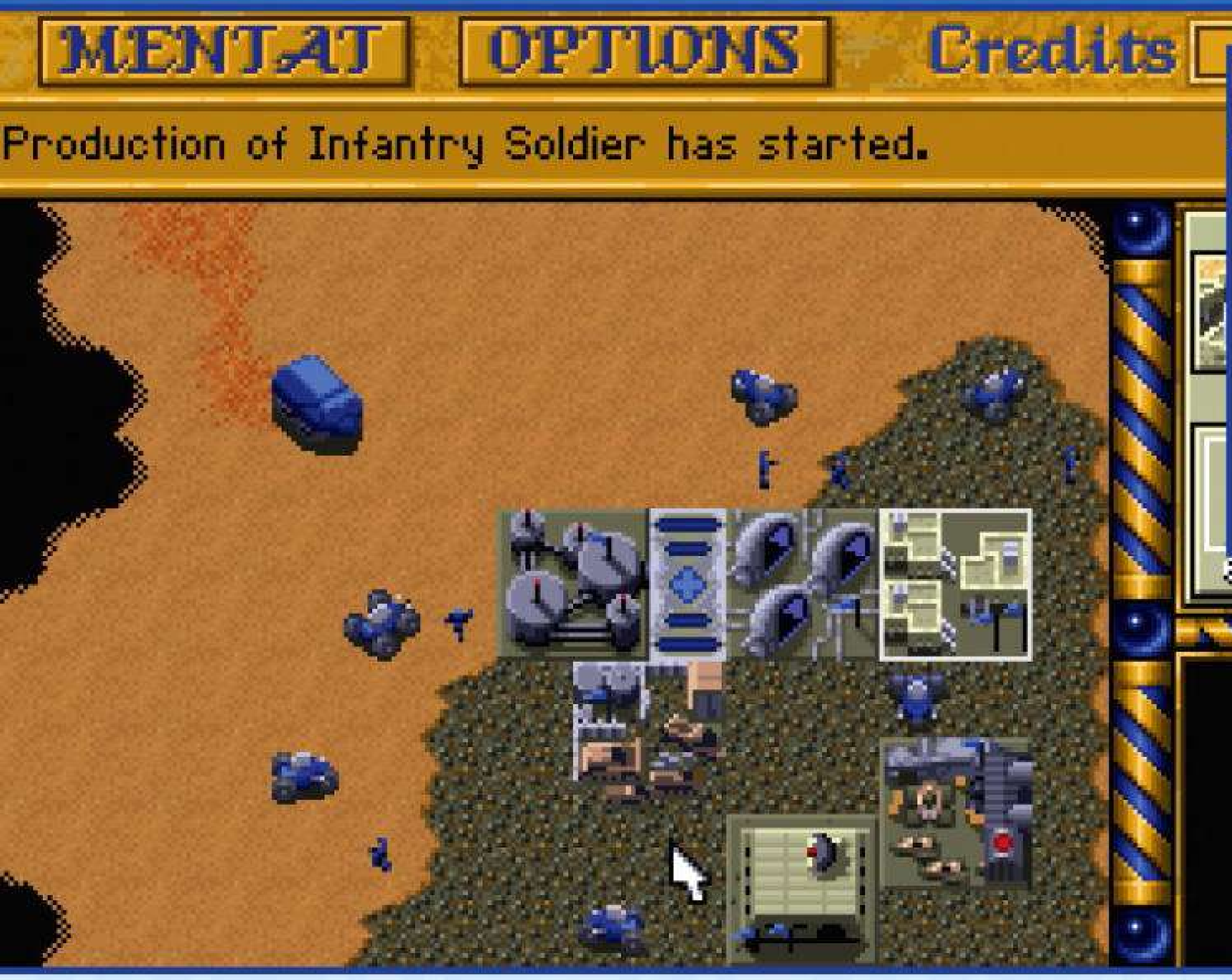
Select your next region

BASE BUILDING

The reason base building has been so important to the RTS genre is that it creates strategy around not only where to place your base, but also having a place to gather resources centrally while quietly building up your army. It means you need to be clever about where things are placed for better defence.

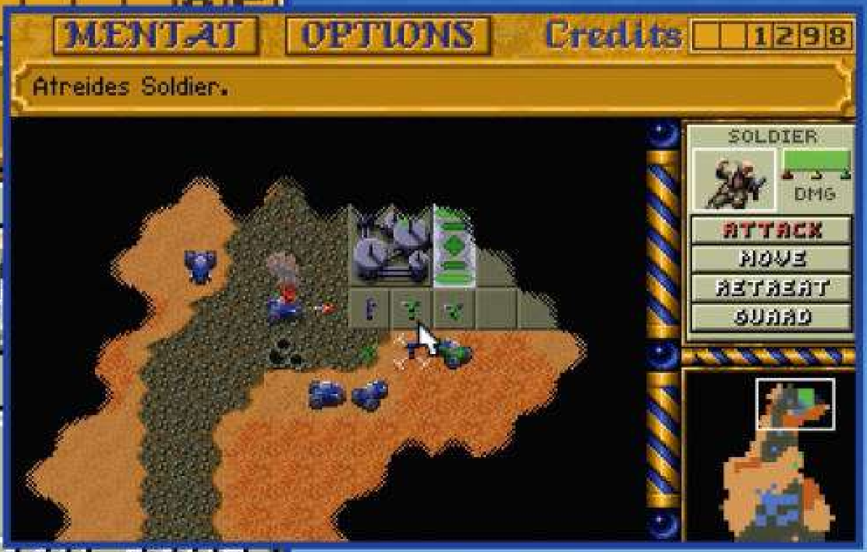
FOG OF WAR

The idea that you needed to scout out the enemy through the 'fog of war' has been one of the most defining aspects of the RTS genre, though this would later evolve so that only the area your units were in had any visibility.



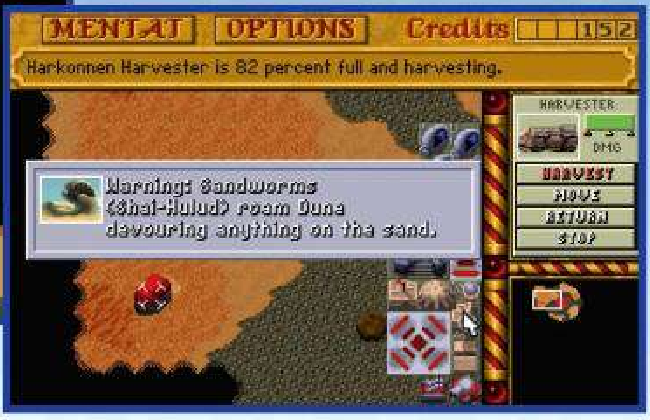
Production of Infantry Soldier has started.

» [PC] It's easy to see the foundations for *Command & Conquer* through *Dune II*, and naturally from there the rest of the RTS genre.



Atreides Soldier.

» [PC] *Dune II* feels very slow to play by modern RTS standards, but without those context-based mouse controls it would be impossible if it was much quicker.



Harkonnen Harvester is 82 percent full and harvesting.

Warning: Sandworms (Shai-Hulud) roam Dune devouring anything on the sand.

» [PC] Like all of the *Dune* games, the sandworms are a significant threat within *Dune II*. Whatever you do, don't let it eat your only spice harvester.

> "WE WERE GIVEN FULL CREATIVE FREEDOM TO PITCH A GAME BASED ON THE DUNE FILM"
>
> **LOUIS CASTLE**

storytelling with a visual style that matched the film, so we were off and running."

Even at the time, one of Westwood's overriding tenets to its games was a drive for high-quality cinematic art to help expand gaming's ability to tell stories; this in itself was advantageous to the development of its *Dune* title, but Louis explains that authenticity for the licences the studio worked on were also a priority. "Westwood treated all of the few licensed games we made with great reverence," he says. "We were big fans of the properties we worked on, long before we had the opportunity to extend the IP into interactive entertainment."

You have probably already heard the tale that suggests it was the Mega Drive's *Herzog Zwei* that had been the driving influence for Westwood when beginning to work on its strategic *Dune* game, but there's a little more to it than that. "Brett Sperry and Louis Castle were intense gamers," recalls Stephen, "so when Seth Mendelsohn and I flew to Las Vegas to talk to them about a strategy game and something like *Herzog Zwei*, which Graeme Devine had been playing in the office, they totally got it."

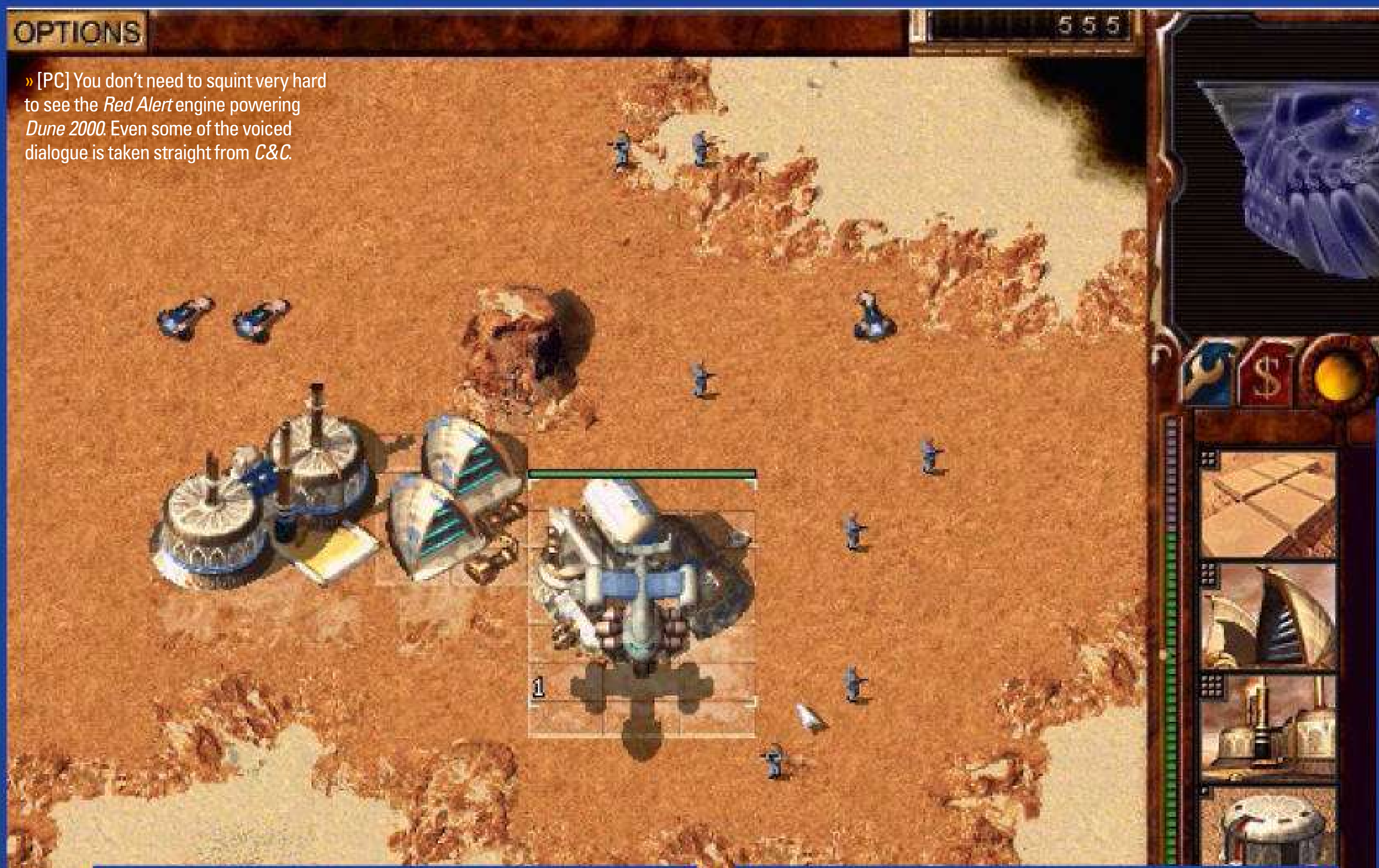
Graeme had been working at Virgin Interactive at the time, and had pointed out *Herzog Zwei* to Stephen as a potential idea for a new strategy game, which was the new direction for the *Dune* title since interest in adventure games was continuing to decline within the industry. Stephen had felt that the significance that the *Dune* novels placed on the spice and water could make for an interesting resource management game, but this was merely a starting point for the discussion and has since become a misattribution of the situation. While Herzog Zwei was a real-time strategy game that involved purchasing units and managing resources, it actually has more in common with modern-day MOBAs than the RTS genre that Westwood's *Dune* game helped to shape. "*Dune II* was not inspired by *Herzog Zwei*," explains Louis. "*Dune II* was inspired by *Military Madness* and *Rescue Raiders*. Brett thought that extending the side-scrolling tower defence play of *Rescue Raiders* into a 3/4 top-down view and two dimensions would be more challenging and offer more opportunity to meet the aesthetic of the *Dune* universe. Joe really liked the turn-based strategy of *Military Madness* and like other Westwood games, felt that moving to real-time choices would be even more fun."

Westwood's approach was just as focused on recreating the memorable visuals of the David Lynch movie as Cryo Interactive's work had been, however it was not so strictly tied to the plot of the film or even the books. The point was the war for Arrakis and control over its mind-altering melange – or spice – and as such Westwood had decided to allow players to choose which House to play as and from there diverge from the typical story of *Dune*.

It was through its gameplay that Westwood had begun to set a lot of the foundations for what would become crucial parts of real-time strategy games, elements such as resource collection and progressively tougher units, a fog of war and even faction-exclusive units. The result was something that was truly innovative, and compelling to play – even if Virgin still had doubts over its potential success. "Virgin was pretty hands off on the type of game and how Westwood would develop it," says Louis, adding that, "there was a great deal of publishing concern that a strategy game just couldn't sell." According to Louis the initial first estimate for the Westwood *Dune* game was only 10,000 units. "When *Dune II* was getting closer to being finished, both Westwood and Virgin staff were having so much fun playing the game that the forecast was tripled then doubled again due to pre-sales. We sold over 100,000 copies and the game was wildly pirated. I would bet over a million people played it."

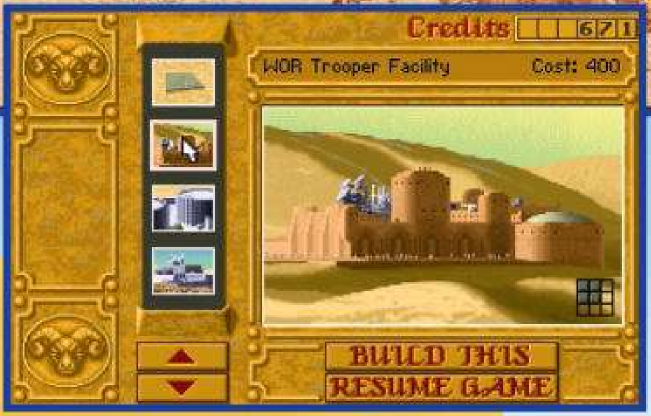
But as Westwood and Virgin were gearing up to release the game, there was a surprising turn of events. The original *Dune* game, which Virgin had believed it had cancelled, had continued development in secret. This came about when in April 1991, Sega had bought out the European divisions of Virgin Interactive, meaning development at Cryo Interactive had continued as though Virgin had never cancelled it. When a Sega audit of Virgin's accounts took place, the mix-up was discovered and Sega realised it didn't own the licence to produce a *Dune* game; despite Cryo's continued work, it was all at risk.

Fortunately, Virgin agreed to take a look at the updated build and with the project now showing promise, it agreed to publish Cryo Interactive's *Dune* adventure game so long as enough progress was made in five weeks to make it more marketable – in other words, the adventure game aspects had to

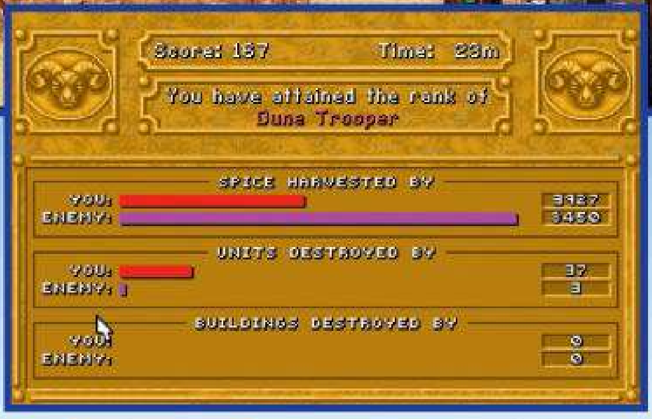


» [PC] You don't need to squint very hard to see the *Red Alert* engine powering *Dune 2000*. Even some of the voiced dialogue is taken straight from *C&C*.

OPTIONS
Enemy carryall drop detected!



» [PC] Building units in *Dune II* was handled within a separate menu screen, one aspect of the game that was quickly fixed with the release of *Command & Conquer*.



Score: 187 Time: 23m

You have attained the rank of Duna Trooper

SPICE HARVESTED BY

YOU: 3927

ENEMY: 3450

UNITS DESTROYED BY

YOU: 37

ENEMY: 3

BUILDINGS DESTROYED BY

YOU: 0

ENEMY: 0

» [PC] A campaign scoreboard was added into *Dune II*, likely due to some industry expectation at the time. Despite that, this concept has lived on in RTS games for years.

be toned down. "We had already started down the path with Westwood making a true strategy game," recalls Stephen, "and while we felt that while the saved-from-death *Dune* game from Cryo was great-looking visually and the first part was a decent adventure game, it needed some more gameplay depth. David Bishop worked closely with Cryo on the second half of the game to bring in those strategy elements." Despite the challenges that Cryo faced, it managed to deliver something that Virgin was happy to proceed with. "Of course getting cancelled was probably no fun for anyone; but you have to admit Cryo really pulled a rabbit out of the hat, delivering a build that was good enough to get uncancelled," adds Stephen.

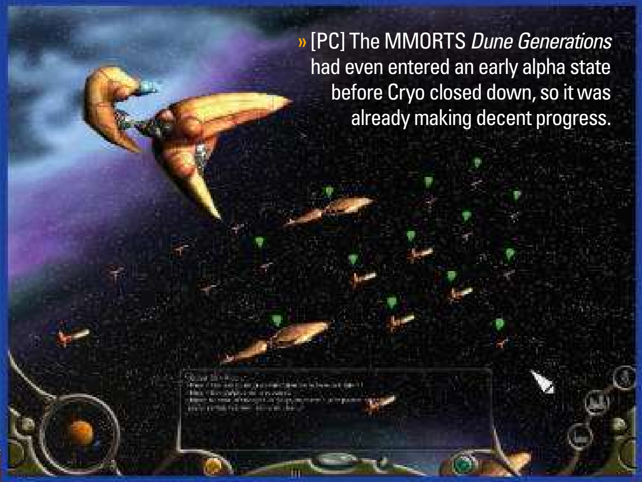
It's true that there aren't many games that can say they survived cancellation, but this left Virgin with a rather unusual predicament. With both *Dune* games releasing in 1992 and both playing in very different ways, there was a risk that the market would just end up being confused. "Martin Alper had mentioned the Cryo game early in our discussions," recalls Louis of the whole debacle. "Martin gave us the impression the Cryo game had been, or was going to be cancelled and seemed genuinely surprised later when Cryo's *Dune* was being completed. We didn't have much time between this revelation and our own game launch which is the primary reason why *Dune II* was named *Dune II*. We were not happy about the name. We wanted to call it *Dune: The Battle For Arrakis* which was later used on the console version." Ultimately it was Cryo's game that bore the *Dune* moniker, sans subtitle, while Westwood's RTS was made to look like a sequel when it was released on DOS by being named *Dune II: The Battle For A Dynasty*. The two were well-received for the time, with the former garnering a greater deal of attention due to its pioneering release on CD-ROM, allowing for rich visuals, audio taken from the David Lynch movie and even a soundtrack that was released alongside the game. *Dune II*, however, received praise for its gameplay, which we all now know went on to inspire Westwood to work on its own RTS with its own IP for full creative freedom. "They were different approaches; *Dune* looked amazing and was fun, but *Dune II* had crazy addictive repeat-play fun," explains Stephen. "In both cases the licence, as with most licences, was there to get people's attention. It's hard to remember just how terrible most licensed games were at that time; at Virgin we really stepped up the quality of our licensed games, to the point where we changed the industry attitude."

> "I THINK WE PITCHED THE SEQUEL TO THEM AS THE NEXT STEP"
>
> **MATTHEW STIBBE**

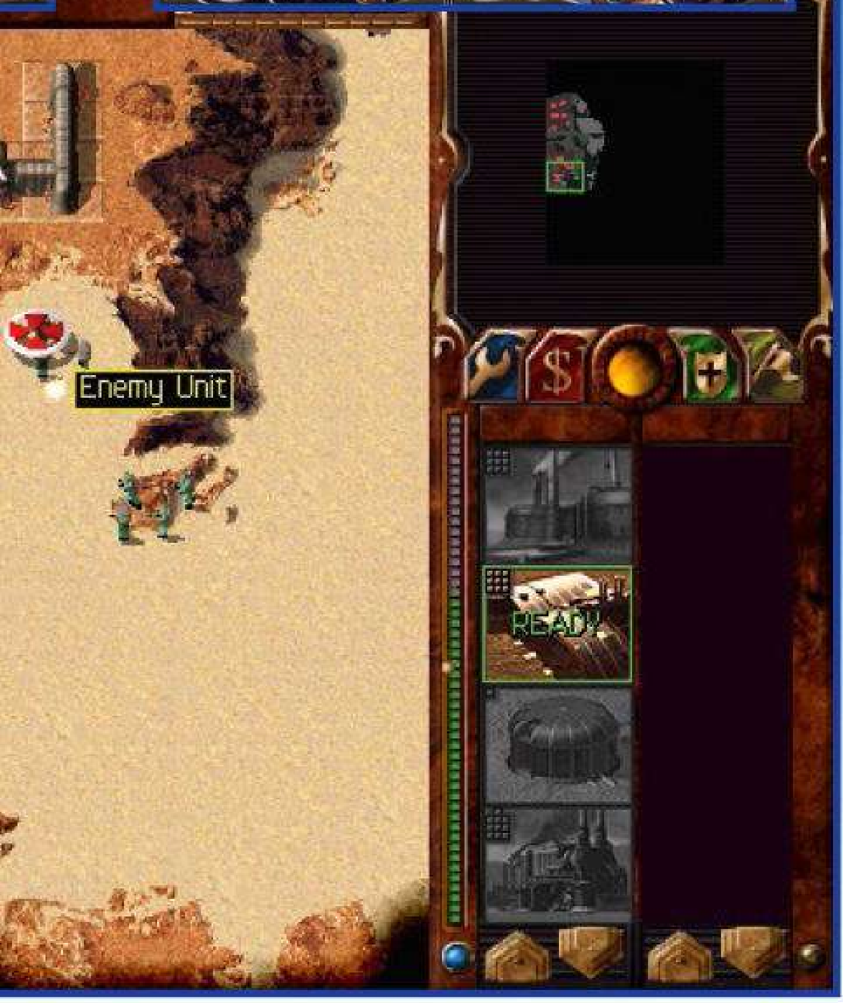
Of the two releases, however, it was Westwood's *Dune II* that went on to have the bigger impact, even if its sales weren't enough to count it as a blockbuster within Virgin. From there came *Warcraft*, *Command & Conquer*, *Age Of Empires* and then an entire new subgenre of strategy game around it. *Dune II* is believed to be the true start of the RTS, and in the intermediate years between the next *Dune* release, the RTS landscape had boomed. Meanwhile, *C&C* had pushed Westwood into the stratosphere, with the studio at the time considered to be one of the greatest developers in the industry – and rightly so. "*Dune II* was recognised as the grandfather of all modern RTS games," says Louis, "but very few people could still play it [by the late Nineties] because it was an MS DOS game. There were also many innovations like context sensitive cursors and drag-to-select that simply made playing the original *Dune II* a bit tedious. Add to all of that the lack of an online multiplayer mode and *Dune II* just needed to be remastered."

Westwood had decided to outsource the remake, however, and through that it reached out to Intelligent Games, a British developer with whom it had worked to produce *Red Alert*'s add-ons *Counterstrike* and *Aftermath*.

"I think what Westwood had thought initially was to take the *Command & Conquer: Red Alert* engine and literally recreate *Dune II* in the engine, almost like treating it like an add-on pack," explains Matthew Stibbe, one of the founders of Intelligent Games. "But the other thing was that we tried to immerse ourselves into the brands that we were working with," he continues. As discussions went on, *Dune 2000* added more and more to the core experience of the original Westwood release and modernised everything: improved input methods, better graphics and even FMV cutscenes the likes of which Westwood had spearheaded with *C&C* all made it into the new and improved *Dune II* remaster. *Dune 2000* released, confusingly, in 1998 and though it was criticised through comparison to the numerous innovations



» [PC] The MMORTS *Dune Generations* had even entered an early alpha state before Cryo closed down, so it was already making decent progress.



» [PC] One area that *Dune 2000* improved over the original was a greater variety of mission objectives, and even the story was changed to accommodate.

that had already occurred within the RTS genre, it was generally considered to be a successful re-envisioning of what was already being considered a classic title in *Dune II*.

"It was very natural that we would do a sequel [to *Dune 2000*]," says Matthew, alluding to the success of the title and the positive experience working with Westwood. "I think we pitched the sequel to them as the next step." Matthew recalls a 3D renderer created by the studio's head of programming, Philip Veale, that allowed for "thousands of little soldiers on the screen at once at a time in the mid/late-Nineties where computer power wasn't that great", which had impressed enough for a sequel to get the green light – though the renderer itself was ultimately not used. Since *Emperor: Battle For Dune* was a fully fledged sequel, Westwood wanted to be a bit more involved than it had been with *Dune 2000*. This essentially meant a lot of quality control to ensure it could stand up to the high standards that came with the LA-based studio. Louis adds that this brought with it Westwood's "signature elements" such as the FMV sequences, while also being "heavily involved in reviewing and contributing to the mission design and more or less did the cutscenes with IG making sure the story still fit the missions".

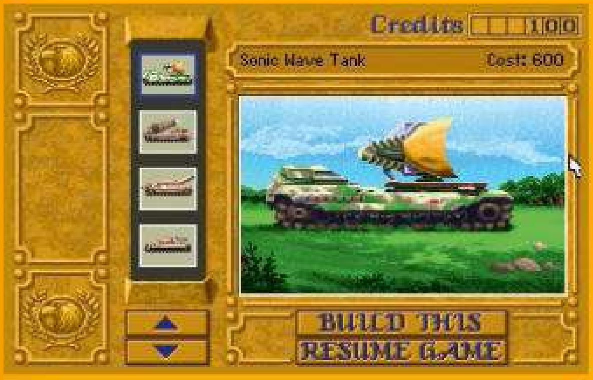
This was of course the chance for Intelligent Games to prove itself not only to Westwood but to the world, but it was also an opportunity to create a new RTS within the *Dune* world years after the genre – the very genre that *Dune II* had a major hand in birthing – had exploded into the gaming industry. There were

▶

THE GREAT SPICE WAR

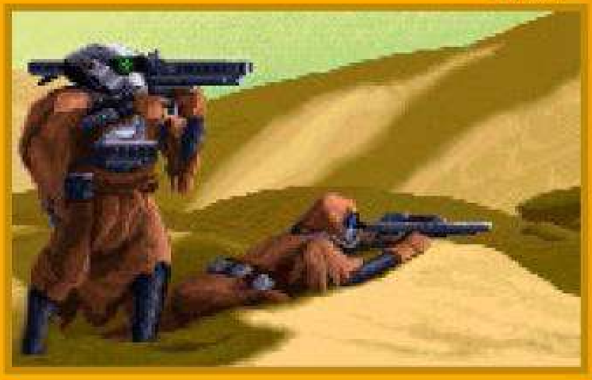
THE UNIQUE UNITS OF EACH FACTION

HOUSE ATREIDES



SONIC TANK

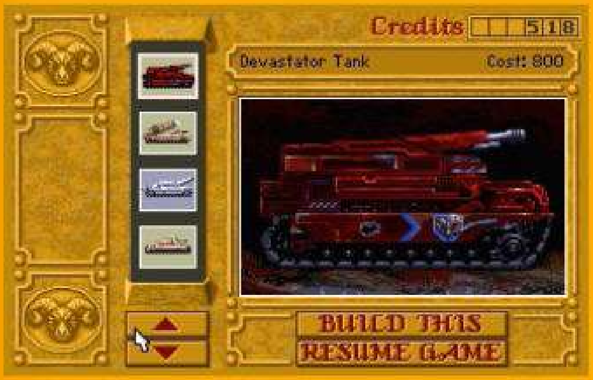
This long-ranged tank is very handy for both attack and defence, but it does deal damage to any units caught in the sonic blast between the tank and its target. So clever positioning is important.



FREMEN

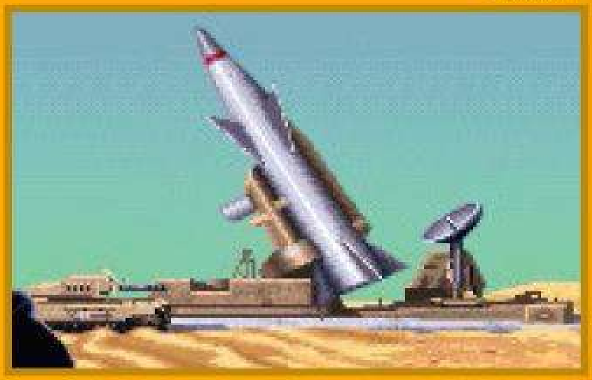
In the story of *Dune*, the Fremen are a crucial ally for House Atreides. In *Dune II* this is represented as the faction's 'superweapon', which summons powerful soldiers that cannot be controlled but will still harass your opponents.

HOUSE HARKONNEN



DEVASTATOR

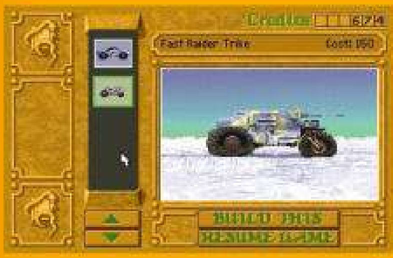
House Harkonnen is well known in the Duniverse for its brash styles and love of nuclear weapons. This tank can sustain a lot of damage, but when it does reach critical point – or when commanded – it will self-destruct with a huge explosion.



DEATH HAND

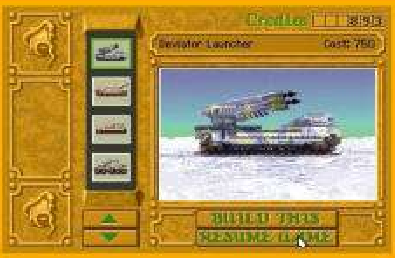
Once you build a Harkonnen Palace, you'll be able to periodically fling a massive missile towards any point on the map. It might be inaccurate, but it's a massive pain in the… um… spice.

HOUSE ORDOS



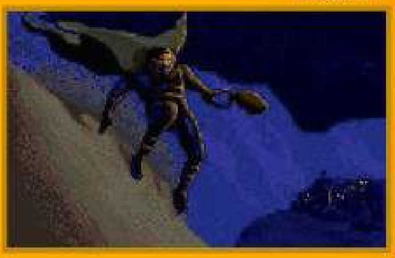
ORDOS RAIDER TRIKE

This is the only unit in the game that replaces the basic version available to all factions. This Trike equivalent is quite a bit faster, but it's also more vulnerable and therefore easier to bring down with focused fire.



DEVIATOR

In line with the House Ordos nature of using tricks and illegal weaponry to achieve its means, the nerve gas fired by the Deviator tank will temporarily change units to the Ordos' side – doing the fighting for them.



SABOTEUR

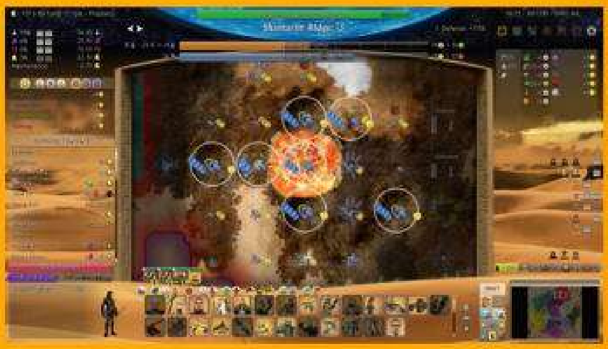
Again, very much in keeping with the nature of House Ordos, the Saboteur is the faction's 'Palace unit'. It's capable of destroying enemy buildings single-handedly, just getting it behind enemy lines is the hard part.

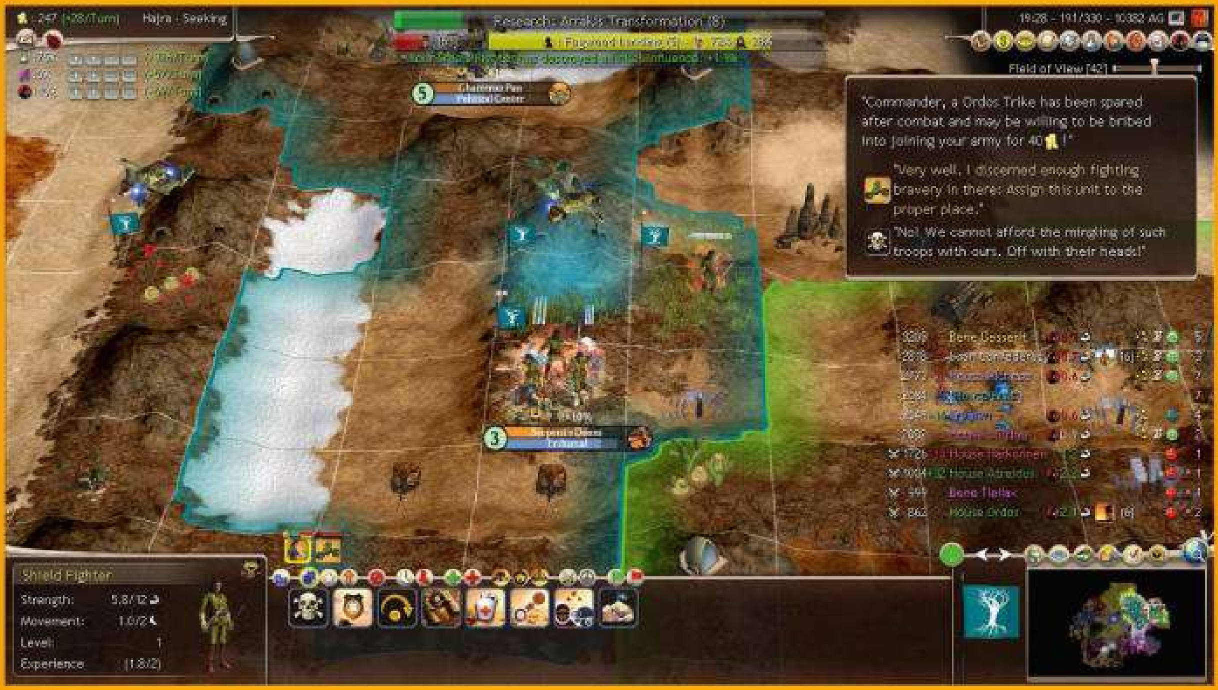
DUNE WARS

HOW IAIN MILLER'S MOD BROUGHT ARRAKIS TO CIVILIZATION

How did the *Dune Wars* mod originally come about?
The idea for the *Dune* mod for *Civilization IV* was discussed in a Civfanatics thread back in 2005, the same year the base game launched. Following much discussion, more threads and a couple of aborted mods by others, Keldath launched the original *Dune Wars 1.0* in May 2009. The key members of the team from this point became David Allen (coder who wrote the spice blow and sandworm gameplay code), Ahriman (designer and frequent play-tester), Koma13 (user interface legend who created the beautiful City and Homeworld screens) and myself (initially artwork focused, but eventually design and coding too).

What was it about *Dune* that interested you in adapting it?
I read the *Dune* books when I was a teenager and they really captured my imagination. I also liked the atmosphere of particularly the first half of the David Lynch movie. I found the idea of realising Arrakis in a strategy game much more fully than had been done previously very appealing. *Dune Wars* became a real passion project for me and so working on it consumed a lot of my time!



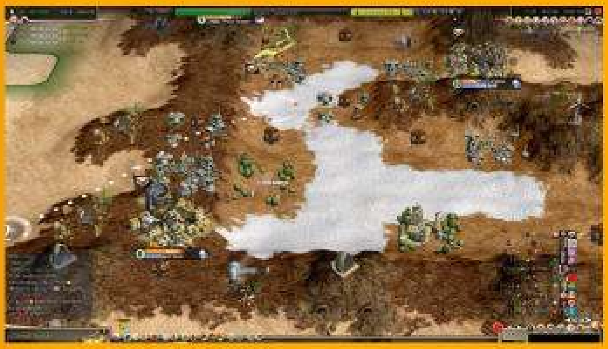


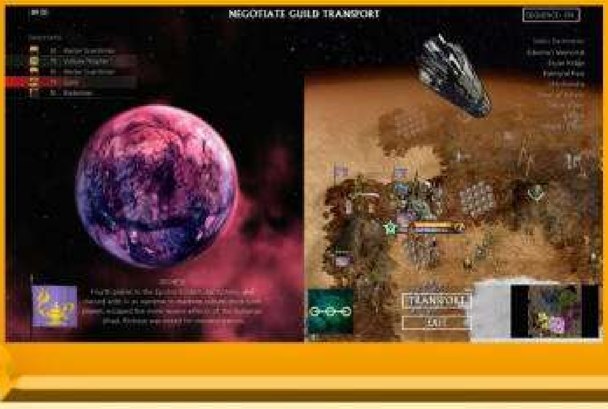
"Commander, a Ordos Trike has been spared after combat and may be willing to be bribed into joining your army for 40 !"

"Very well. I discerned enough fighting bravery in there: Assign this unit to the proper place."

"No! We cannot afford the mingling of such troops with ours. Off with their heads!"

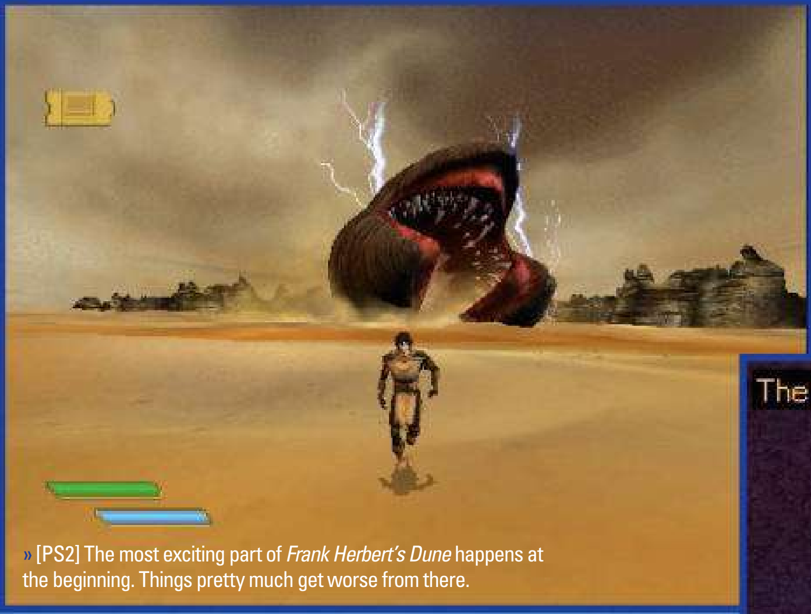
Shield Fighter
Strength: 5.8/12
Movement: 1.0/2
Level: 1
Experience (1.8/2)



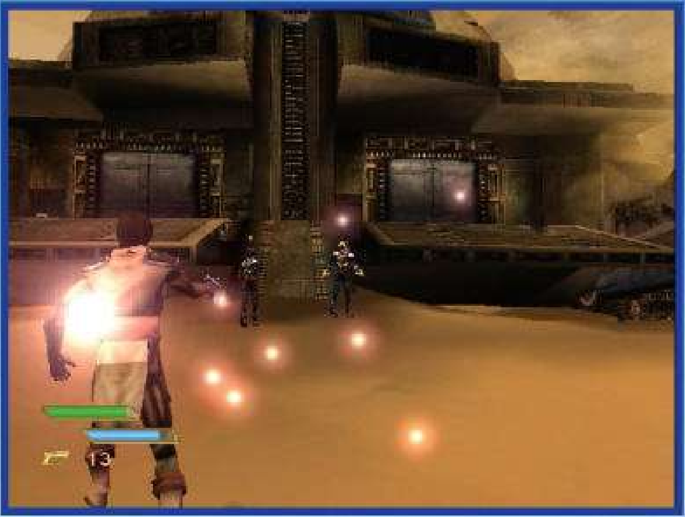


Had you played any of the *Dune* games?
Yes, I played both Cryo's *Dune* and Westwood's *Dune II* in the Nineties and have fond memories of both. *Dune Wars* is a real mashup of the Frank Herbert Duniverse together with ideas brought in from Westwood and some bits from the later Brian Herbert novels. We tried to finesse all these elements into a coherent whole with nods to both fans of the novels and the Westwood games. There are some graphical influences from the old *Dune* games too; the cinnamon coloured spice and windtraps are very much *Dune II* and the tiny cave features were loosely inspired by the sietch entrances from the earlier Cryo game.

What was the hardest thing to implement in *Dune Wars*?
It's hard to single out just one, a few spring to mind: having spice blows randomly creating areas of spice to be harvested and the whole spice economy, having sandworms roaming the desert attempting to eat spice harvesters and units, the radically different abilities of each faction [and] the overhaul of Espionage with unique spy units for each faction.



» [PS2] The most exciting part of *Frank Herbert's Dune* happens at the beginning. Things pretty much get worse from there.



» [PS2] The gameplay of Cryo's second *Dune* game is primarily stealth-based, but since this is the PS2 era there is no avoiding the gunfights either.

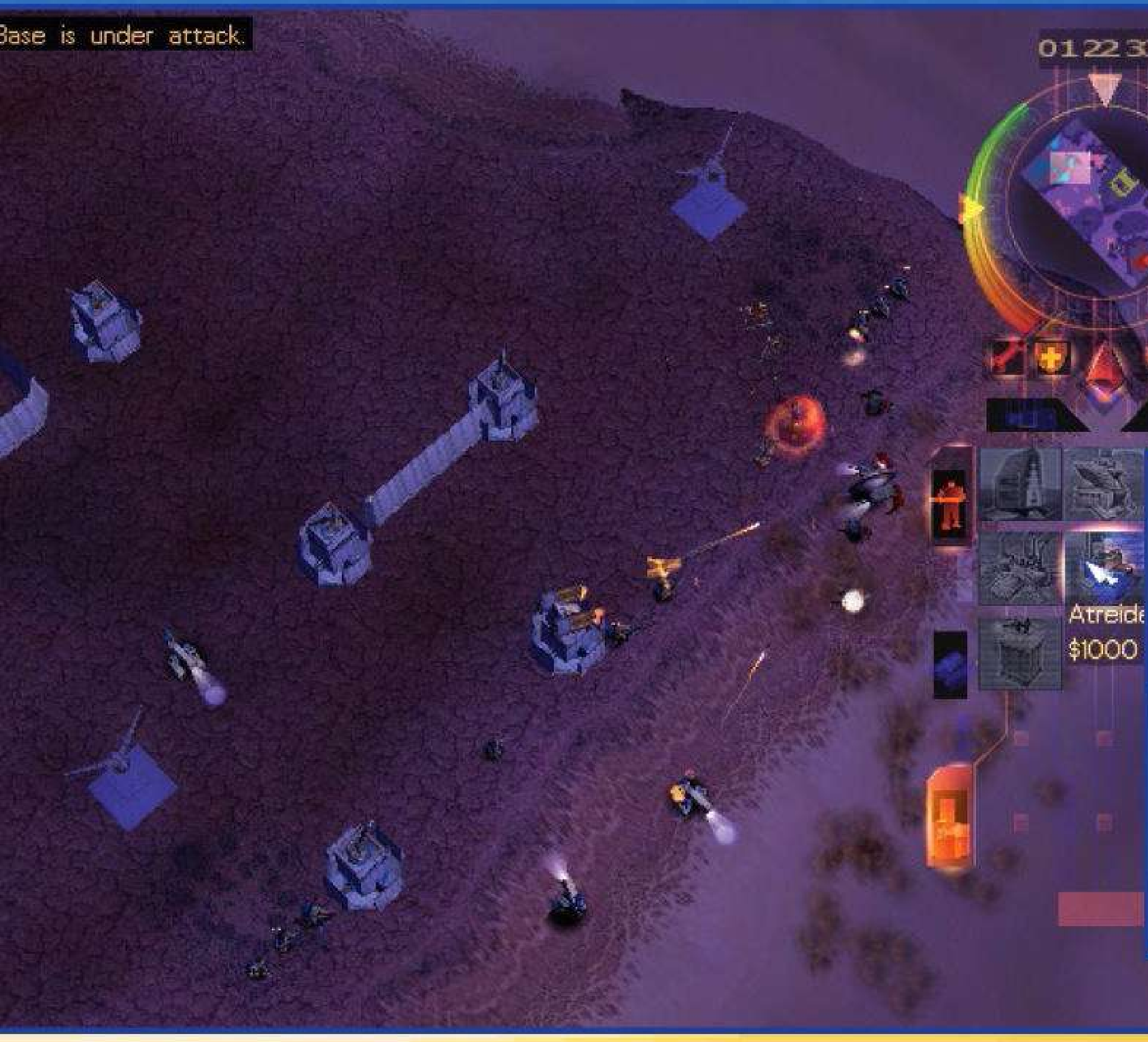
> "I'M NOT SURE THE DUNE FRANCHISE IS ACTUALLY ALL THAT WELL-SUITED FOR VIDEOGAMES"
>
> LOUIS CASTLE

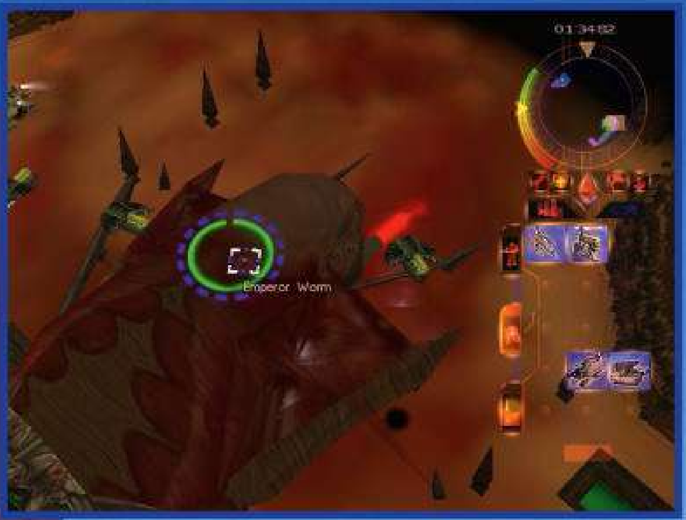
going to be challenges, of course, the RTS genre was sort of a new frontier for the industry and any and all developers were looking to make it big with the next big contender to *Warcraft* or *C&C*. "We went with a 3D approach to it," says Matthew, who points to the efforts of Phil but also Richard Evans, head of graphic design, in creating a world that could live up to the acclaimed universe that Frank Herbert had created.

"*Emperor* got some good reviews, but one of the things that sticks in my mind was just how beautiful it was, it just really brought that world to life," says Matthew. But it wasn't just the visuals, Intelligent Games also looked to add in some new features, even if there was a concerted effort to keep the innovations to a minimum. "We had an attempt to do something innovative with the gameplay design so the idea of having subhouses like the Ix and so on, that came from us. The idea being that by allying with the subhouse you could change the shape of the game." A lot of input did come from the team at Westwood, admits Matthew, who explains that, "Westwood had some very strong ideas about how games got balanced, so this rock-paper-scissors idea. Sometimes there were discussions around how we can move some of those mechanisms forward, and I think there was a strong gravitational pull back to the institutional knowledge of Westwood about what they knew worked."

The sequel to *Dune 2000* came at an opportune moment, since the world was once again going to have *Dune* on its mind. This time it was due to the Sci-Fi Channel's *Dune* miniseries, written and directed by John Harrison and first aired in December 2000, with *Emperor: Battle For Dune*

» [PC] The move to 3D for *Emperor: Battle For Dune* meant it was possible to do a lot more visually interesting things with the desert plant.





» [PC] As a sequel to *Dune 2000*, *Emperor* brought in aspects of the later *Dune* novels – particularly this sandworm/man combo in reference to the *God Emperor Of Dune* book.

» [PC] Westwood's signature FMVs helped to bring the world of *Dune* to life, and were arguably more in-depth and detailed than even *Command & Conquer*'s equivalents.

releasing on PS2 and Windows in 2001. But if you can believe it, Cryo Interactive had once again managed to chime in with another *Dune* game alongside the Westwood equivalent, with *Frank Herbert's Dune* also releasing in 2001 and being more closely tied to the miniseries of the same name. Where *Emperor: Battle For Dune* was a sequel to *Dune 2000* and had its storyline unfettered by restrictions with any film or TV source, Cryo's next *Dune* release was marketed as a tie-in, despite only sharing the soundtrack with the miniseries.

Sadly, Cryo Interactive was already struggling to keep its doors open around the time of the game's development, and the release of *Frank Herbert's Dune* did nothing to improve the situation. It was a third-person shooter with a focus on stealth, tasking players – as Paul Atreides – to unite the Fremen and through that conquer Arrakis. It was fairly horrendous, however, with subpar 3D graphics, shonky gameplay and poor attention to what it was that *Dune* fans loved about the universe. The game released in 2001, and it was met with almost unanimous criticism, and is the only *Dune* game that can be considered a dud.

During this time Cryo was planning to publish another *Dune* game, this time for the Game Boy Advance. Unlike previous games, *Dune Ornithopter Assault* was a shooting game with varied missions that ranged from escorting ships to capturing vehicles and harvesting spice and water. Developed by Soft Brigade, it was extremely ambitious in its scope and even featured multiplayer support, but it never saw the light of day. According to Unseen 64, despite it being possible to complete each mission, ongoing financial issues as Cryo meant the game was never submitted to Nintendo for approval. It was later leaked online in 2015.

Despite the cancellation of *Dune Ornithopter Assault* and the poor reception of *Frank Herbert's Dune*, the days were already numbered for Cryo Interactive. Though the developer – and by extension its publishing arm Cryo Networks – had other projects in the works, the main beacon of hope on the horizon for the company was *Dune Generations*. Set to be an MMORTS that combined the political, economical and military aspects of the *Dune* universe, there was potential for the next game from Cryo to turn things around, and to achieve the noble aim of rolling all of the *Dune* novels' complexities into a cohesive, playable world. Despite entering into alpha stage in February 2002, Cryo could do nothing to stave off the debt collectors and in mid-2002 the company declared bankruptcy, and with it the potential of *Dune Generations* was lost.

And now it's 2021, and *Dune* is once again a hot topic. It's almost cyclical like that. Though the recent film has been divisive in its opinions, there's no doubting its success – and perhaps that could mean new opportunities for the universe within videogames, too. A lot has changed in the games industry since 2001, and a broader spectrum of genres and play styles could mean something special for fans of the universe if the right developer got hold of the rights. Interestingly, *Dune Ornithopter Assault* has been recently revived via Kickstarter, after the game was secured from the original developers. It's now known as *Elland: The Crystal Wars* and has no links to the official licence, but it's still going to be of interest to *Dune* fans. The hopes of most *Dune* fans are currently with MMO developer Funcom, as it's already known to be working on an MMO survival game in the Duniverse. Considering the success it had in bringing Conan The Barbarian to the same space with *Conan Exiles* in 2017, there's every chance that its new project could be the next big milestone for *Dune* and videogames.

But perhaps there should be some words of warning, whether for Funcom or any other plucky studio that might be considering bringing Arrakis to life, "I'm not sure the *Dune* franchise is actually all that well-suited for videogames," admits Louis, who suggests that "the tangled web of relationships surrounding creative rights" could also be a barrier that holds *Dune* back from once again finding videogaming greatness. "The game teams that made successful *Dune* games had some heavy lifting to bring a richly narrative world with deep backstory to an interactive experience. The plus is the richness of the world, which is also the challenge. Living up to those standards in any other media is very difficult." *

SPECTACULAR SPARKY

Having previously developed Angry Video Game Nerd Adventures and Manos: The Hands Of Fate, Sam Beddoes has turned his attention to paying homage to the Mega Drive and one of its most celebrated developers, Treasure

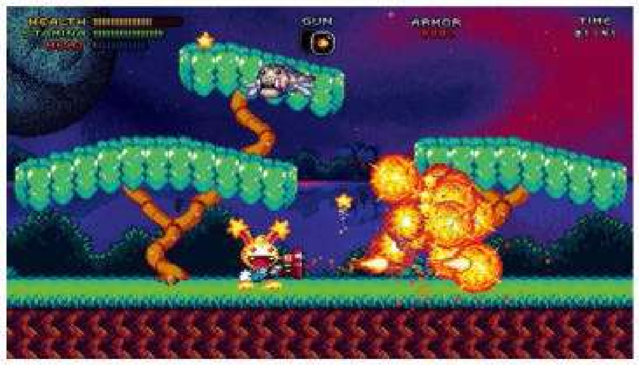
WORDS BY NICK THORPE

» Sam Beddoes is the developer behind *Spectacular Sparky.*

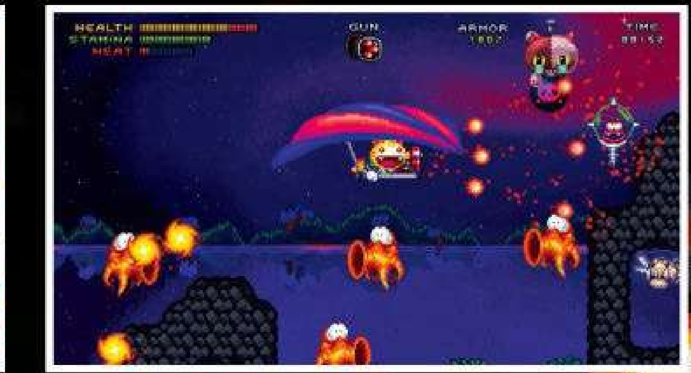
When discussing cult favourite game developers, Treasure is a name that is bound to come up. Fans love the developer for its classic action games and shoot-'em-ups, many of which were technically masterful – just think back to the likes of *Guardian Heroes*, *Sin & Punishment*, *Ikaruga* and *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*. Of course, the platform that Treasure is perhaps most associated with is the Mega Drive, and it's the developer's classics on that console that inspired much of the gameplay of *Spectacular Sparky*. This game gives you control of the titular character, an odd bunny-like alien who acts as an interplanetary bounty hunter. Taking missions from the shark-pig Shigg, you'll take on 24 stages of intense platform shooting, with occasional interludes for vehicle-based sections including traditional shoot-'em-up stages and a lava Jet Ski ride. Various weapons are available, including spread shots, flamethrowers, homing missiles and laser beams, and you'll need to master them all to take down the bosses at the end of each stage.

Sam Beddoes is the man responsible for much of *Spectacular Sparky*, so what's his history with Treasure's games? "The first one I played was *Gunstar Heroes* on the Mega Drive," he says. "It was an absolute riot! From the first seconds of playing it you know what you're in for, everything just feels so over-the-top and chaotic, without being overbearing with intense difficulty from the word go like some of its contemporaries, and I loved that." He's keen to point out that the appeal of Treasure games carries across genres, too. "There's a sort of intangible quality to them you don't see in the likes of *Contra*. For example, *Dynamite Headdy* doesn't play anything like *Gunstar Heroes* or *Alien Soldier*, but it still has their signature feel. They're so satisfying to play and have such character."

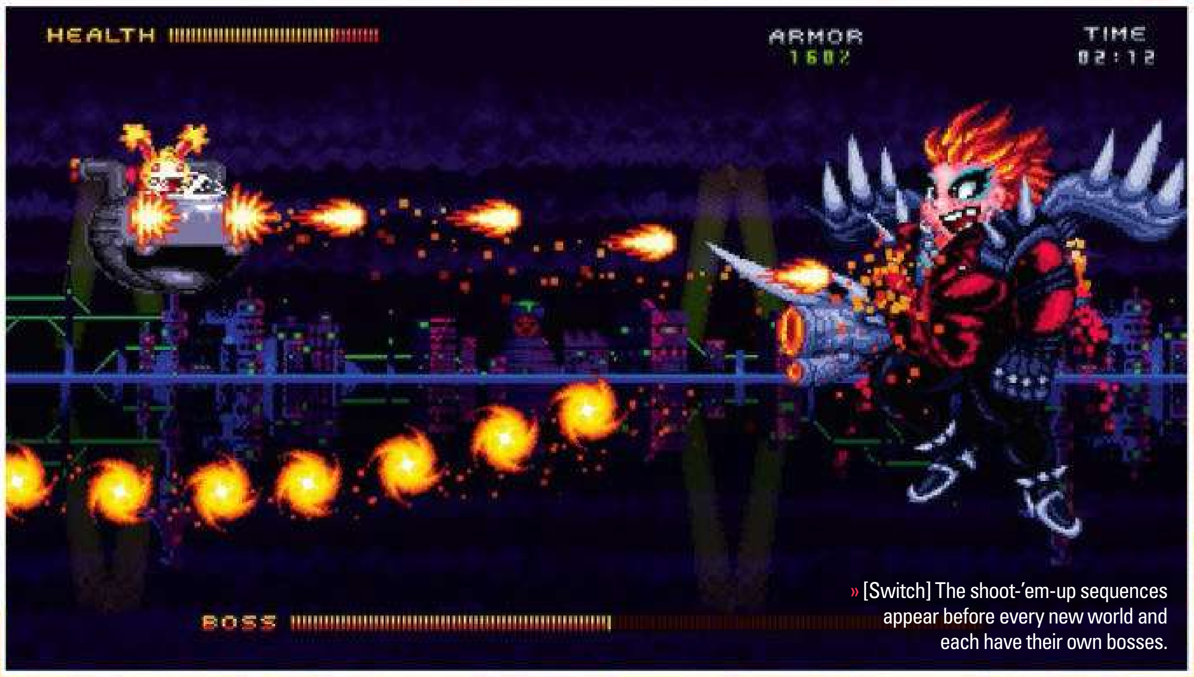
One thing that Sam mentions is that the homage goes further than just Treasure's games. "While Treasure games inspired the core gameplay a lot, going into *Sparky* I said it should be, 'To the Sega Mega Drive what *Shovel Knight* was to the NES.' There are so many Nintendo-inspired indie games out there, and I love Nintendo too, but the Mega Drive doesn't get enough love! So while it may play like *Gunstar Heroes* and *Alien Soldier*, its visuals, characters and personality owe a lot to *Sonic*, *Ristar*, *Dynamite Headdy*, *Rocket Knight Adventures*/*Sparkster*, *ToeJam & Earl*, Gynoug and others," he explains. "A lot of indie games put a lot of effort into being a singular old property minus the licence, and that's not what I wanted to do here. We looked outside of Sega properties too; enemy designer Karl [Howe] looked at all kinds of things he loves, we often just sat in a pub free forming with a



» [Switch] Just looking at these trees, you can see the graphical homage to *Gunstar Heroes*.



» [Switch] The hang-glider feels a little like the shoot-'em-up sections that are more frequent throughout the game.



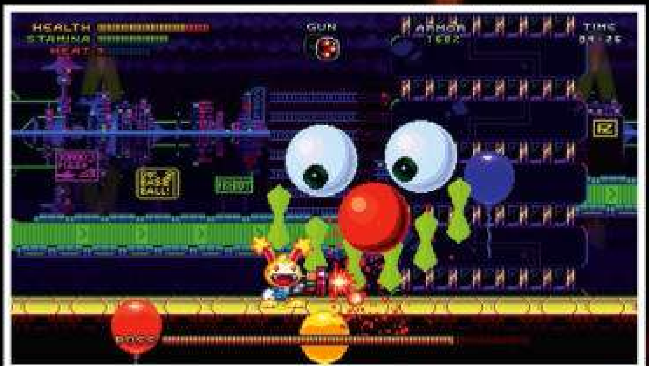
» [Switch] The shoot-'em-up sequences appear before every new world and each have their own bosses.

pencil and paper, creating bizarre alien designs and refining them later on." You'll even find some fun retro references in the game. "The majority of the game's big references are in the Mechopolis stage, on the billboards and graffiti," Sam explains. "The 'Megadroid' graffiti references Fleetway's *Sonic The Comic*, which inspired a ton of this game's content. 'CAKE' is a callback to the Chris Morris show *Brass Eye*. The Melon Head boss is an homage to recurring Treasure boss Melon Bread."

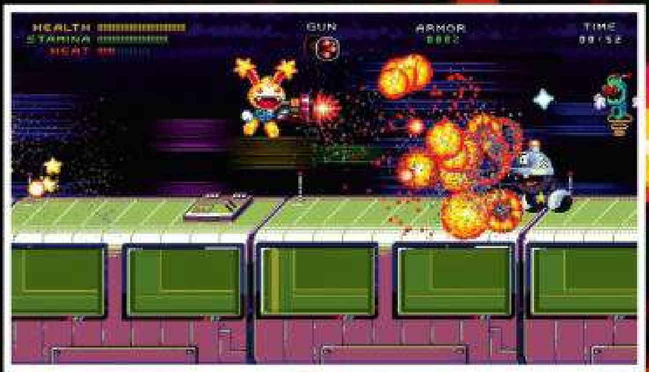
It's not a strictly 16-bit experience, of course. "*Sparky* sticks to the spirit of the Mega Drive but not the limitations of it. Particle effects galore, high-quality voice acting, widescreen and so on, what I did try to stick to was the high-contrast look," Sam explains. "Even Sega-inspired indie games like *Freedom Planet* and *Spark The Electric Jester* tend to have a SNES-like look due to having more colours to play with. While I didn't stick to the Mega Drive's palette limitations I tried to keep the contrast high between shades of colour, creating the illusion of having a limited palette to work with. I've always felt, though, that it's silly to replicate limitations of the era to the detriment of the game."

The aforementioned voice acting is a particular highlight, with plenty of amusing dialogue from an eclectic cast of voice actors. "Sparky's voice actor, Sebastian Todd, I found when perusing YouTube for demo reels. One voice Sebastian could do sounded exactly how I had imagined Sparky, so I immediately got in touch," says Sam. Others include Curtis Arnott, who Sam had previously met at a convention, Tom Campbell of Cultaholic, and friends of Sam including JD Kelly and Mika Mitchell. Sam even recorded some dialogue of his own. However, one actor stands out in particular – Sean Barrett. "I first noticed his voice acting in old anime like *Dominion Tank Police* and *Cyber City OEDO 808*, but later found he had been in so many things I loved growing up, such as *Return To Oz, The Dark Crystal* and *Through The Dragon's Eye*," Sam explains. "I had a character inspired by the aforementioned anime series' and dreamed of having his voice in there. With the help of a YouTuber friend, Mentski, we found his agency and got in touch, and he was absolutely amazing!"

Spectacular Sparky is out now as a digital download on Switch and PC. Give it a try and soak in its 16-bit-styled goodness. *



» [Switch] Treasure fans will recognise this floating collection of facial features – it's a tribute to Melon Bread!



» [Switch] We were hoping to see a train sequence like in *Alien Soldier*, and weren't disappointed.

HEALTH
STAMINA
HEAT
GUN
ARMOR
TIME
00:57

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NICALIS
- » **DEVELOPER:** FREAKZONE GAMES
- » **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- » **PLATFORM:** SWITCH, PC
- » **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

What can Sparky actually do?

FLY

■ By repeatedly tapping the jump button, Sparky can actually fly short distances by flapping his ears. Each push of the button drains the stamina gauge, and it won't recover until Sparky lands on the ground.

DASH

■ When the R button is pressed, Sparky will shoot ahead in the direction he's facing, passing through enemies and obstacles unharmed. This drains a portion of the stamina gauge and is a crucial skill to master for many boss fights.

SWITCH WEAPONS

■ Sparky can carry two weapons and switch between them by pressing the L button. Though he's got access to rapid fire, holding the fire button for too long will overheat and destroy the weapon, reverting to Sparky's basic gun.

MOVE LOCK

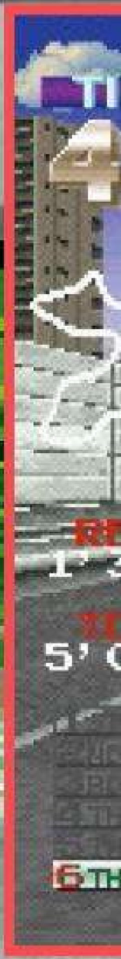
■ Want to aim your gun without all that bothersome moving around? By pressing ZR, you can have Sparky stand in place and fire in any direction. We don't recommend doing it for too long though, due to the game's frantic pace.

AIM LOCK

■ Want to move around without your gun's aim irritatingly changing? Hold the ZL button and Sparky will keep shooting in the current direction, no matter where he's going. Dashing with aim lock still propels Sparky forward, even if he's moving backwards.

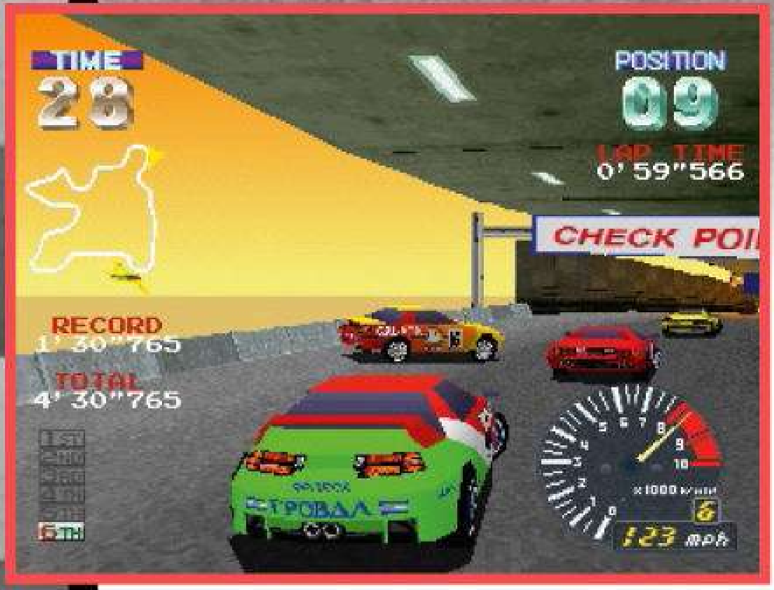
ULTIMATE GUIDE

RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION

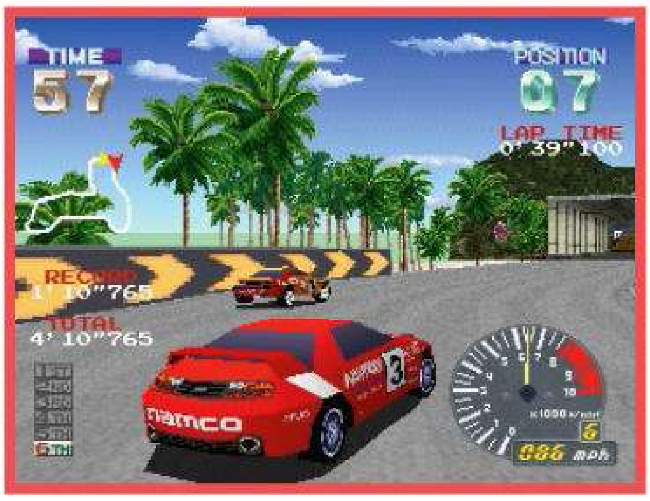


IT'S A STRAIGHTER SEQUEL THAN ITS NAME MIGHT SUGGEST, BUT THIS PLAYSTATION EXCLUSIVE FOLLOW-UP TO THE ARCADE RACING HIT OFFERS PLENTY OF FUN FOR ANYONE WHO LOVED THE ORIGINAL, SO WE'LL DIVE DEEP INTO EVERY ASPECT OF THIS CLASSIC RACING GAME

WORDS BY NICK THORPE



» [PlayStation] When cars bunch up, things can get heated as bumpers start to touch.



» [PlayStation] The aesthetic here is a glorious mid-Nineties arcade one, with blue skies and sunny beaches.

If there were a hall of fame for console launch games, *Ridge Racer* would surely be a first ballot entry. It had been a pioneering arcade game thanks to its use of texture-mapped polygon graphics, so the PlayStation conversion was astonishing – just over a year later, we had an outrageously close reproduction that we could play in our own homes. The game sold over a million copies worldwide and developer Namco clearly believed that we couldn't have too much of a good thing, so it put a sequel into production.

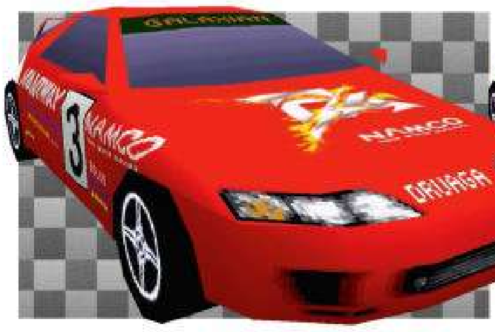
This time though, Namco wouldn't draw on an arcade game. *Rave Racer* only appeared in coin-op form in the summer of 1995, leaving little time to get a conversion ready for the end of the year. Instead the team created a brand-new *Ridge Racer* for the PlayStation, retaining the look and feel of the first game. The cars all returned and the visuals looked pretty similar overall, with the main change being some engine tweaks to deliver more stable performance. *Ridge Racer 2*'s arcade soundtrack was used for the game, meaning that there were remixes of the original tunes such as *Rare Hero* and *Rotterdam Nation*, alongside brand-new ones in the same style like *Lords Of Techno*, *Maximum Zone* and *Drive U 2 Dancing*. That irritating commentator is back too, with new lines guaranteed to wind you up as you jostle for first place.

However, the game did have brand-new features to boast about, with the most significant being a new set of tracks. Just as in the original game, each of the three tracks shares common elements, in this case the starting line in the city and the first stretch of coastline. From there they branch off into progressively more difficult sections – the Novice track takes in a good bit more of the beach, the Intermediate track proceeds along cliff side roads and the Expert track incorporates a very narrow tunnel section. They're all as well-designed as before but they feel quite a bit trickier to master, and since each represents a genuine step up in difficulty as well as speed, it'll take a bit of practice to achieve first place on all of them. Once you do manage that feat, the credits will roll and you'll unlock reversed versions of all three tracks. However, the game is far from over at that point.

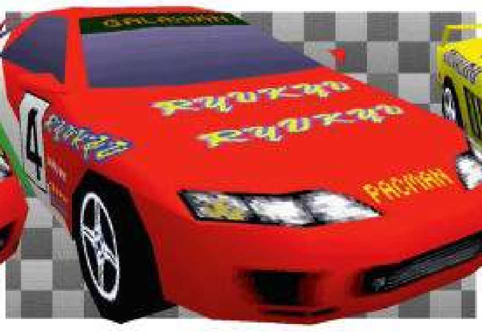
The toughest challenge in the original game was winning the 13th Racing car, commonly referred to as the Devil Car. That returns in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, alongside the new 13th Racing Kid and White Angel, with each being the reward for victory on one of the three tracks in the Time Trial mode.

STARTING GRID

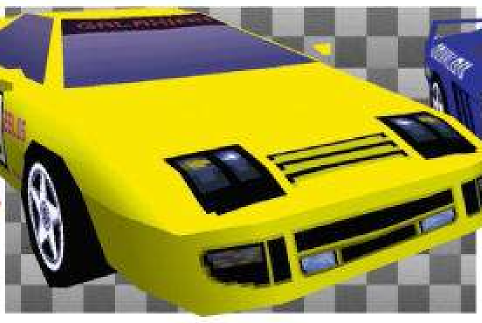
HERE ARE ALL THE CARS YOU'LL BE RACING WITH AND AGAINST IN RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION



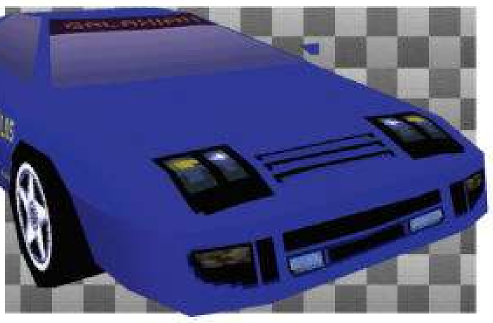
F/A RACING



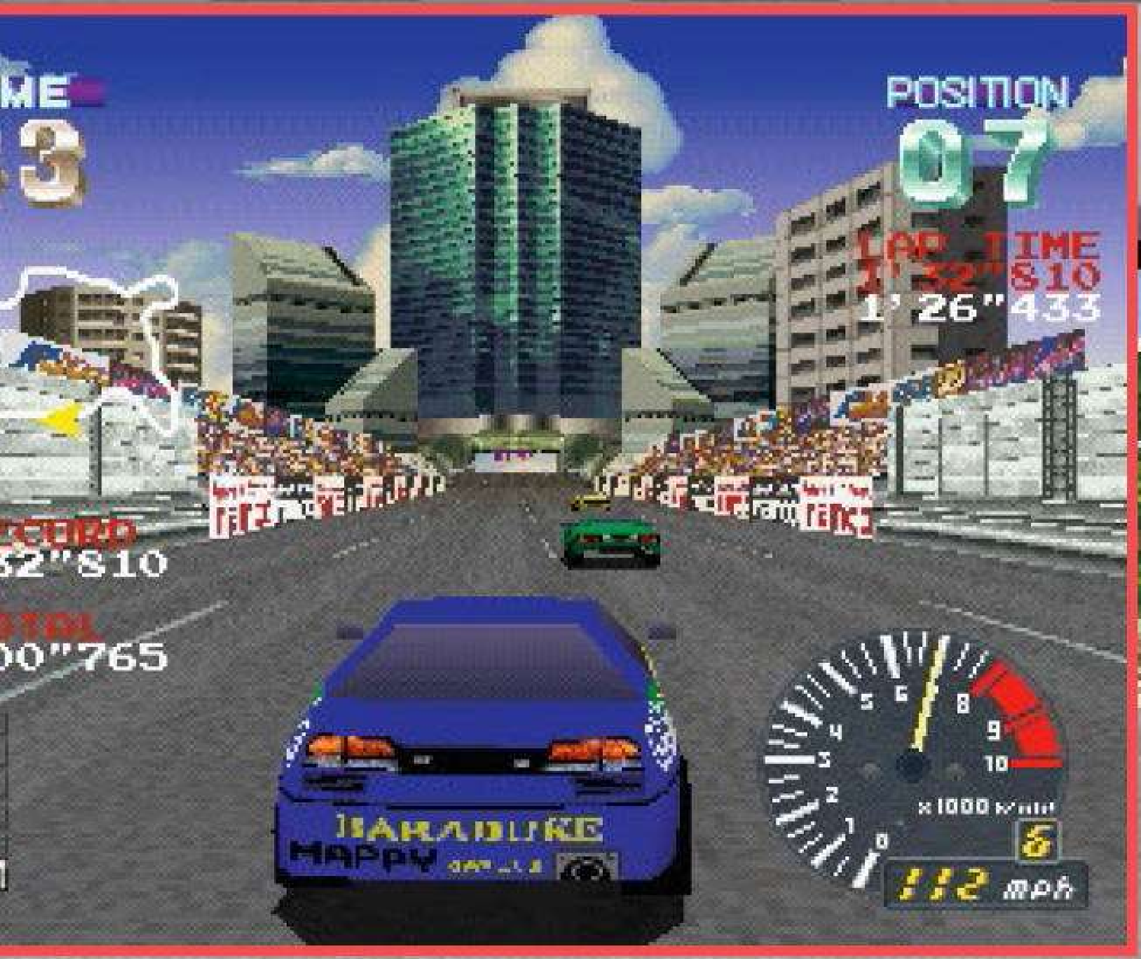
RT RYUKYU



RT YELLOW SOLVALOU



RT BLUE SOLVALOU



» [PlayStation] Even the initial city starting straight looks very similar to the original game

POSITION
05

» [PlayStation] Those fantastic little graphical touches like helicopters flying overhead are still present.

POSITION
06

» [PlayStation] Race well enough and you'll earn the right to use the terrifyingly fast secret cars.

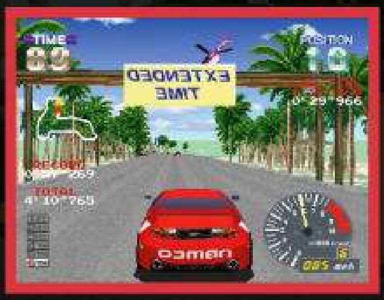
Simply being fast isn't enough here, as you'll need to perfect your defensive driving to keep these speed demons at bay. There's also a new Free Run mode that just allows you to practice each track at your leisure, and a wealth of hidden secrets to discover and play around with. Multiplayer racing was the most exciting addition to the game, as the original *Ridge Racer* had been a solo experience. However, in practice it was experienced by relatively few players as it used the PlayStation link cable, meaning that both players needed a console and a copy of the game, as well as a TV to play on – a prohibitively expensive option at the time.

R*idge Racer Revolution* was released in Japan on 3 December 1995, exactly one year after the original game. It followed to Europe in May 1996, with North American players finally getting their chance to play it in September 1996. The game received a positive critical reception, earning scores of 5/5 from *Maximum*, 95% from *CVG*, 93% from *Play*, 91% from *Ultimate Future Gamer*, 9/10 from *PlayStation Power*, 87% from *PlayStation Plus*, 81% from *GamesMaster*, 8/10 from the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* and 7/10 from *Edge*. *CVG* enjoyed the "sheer volume of features it contains" and the "brilliance of the presentation". *Play* felt that multiplayer racing was "the most sorely missed feature from *Ridge Racer*" and welcomed its

SECRET SAUCE

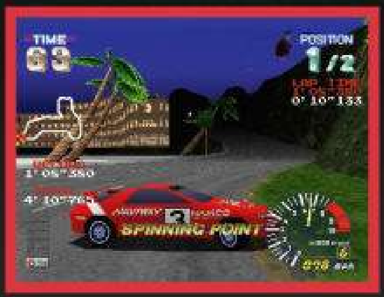
RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION HOLDS PLENTY OF SECRETS – HERE ARE THE MOST EXCITING ONES

MIRROR MODE



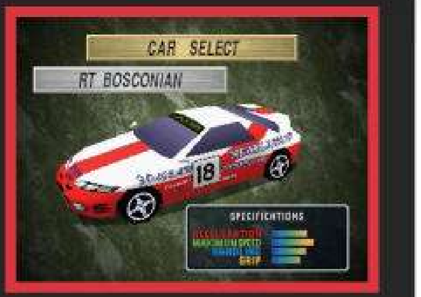
Turn around at the start of the race and charge into the big barrier, at a speed of at least 60mph. You'll pass right through it and enter a mirrored version of the track, with all corners taking the opposite direction and even backwards textures on buildings and scenery.

DRIFT CONTEST



Select a Time Trial track, and when you select Start from the menu, hold the X and square buttons. At certain corners, the text "Spinning Point" will appear at the bottom of the screen, and you'll be scored on your ability to perform outrageous drifts of 360 degrees or more.

EXTRA CARS

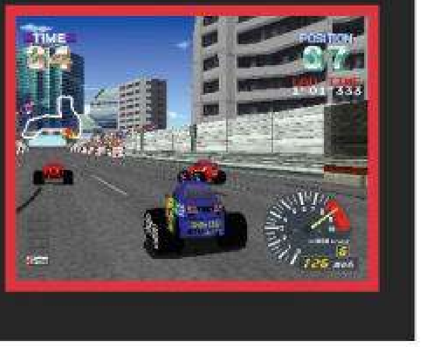


You have access to four cars at the start of the game, but you can triple that number by unlocking the other eight racers that appear during regular gameplay. To do that, you'll need to play a perfect game on the *Galaga '88* loading screen by shooting down 40 enemies.

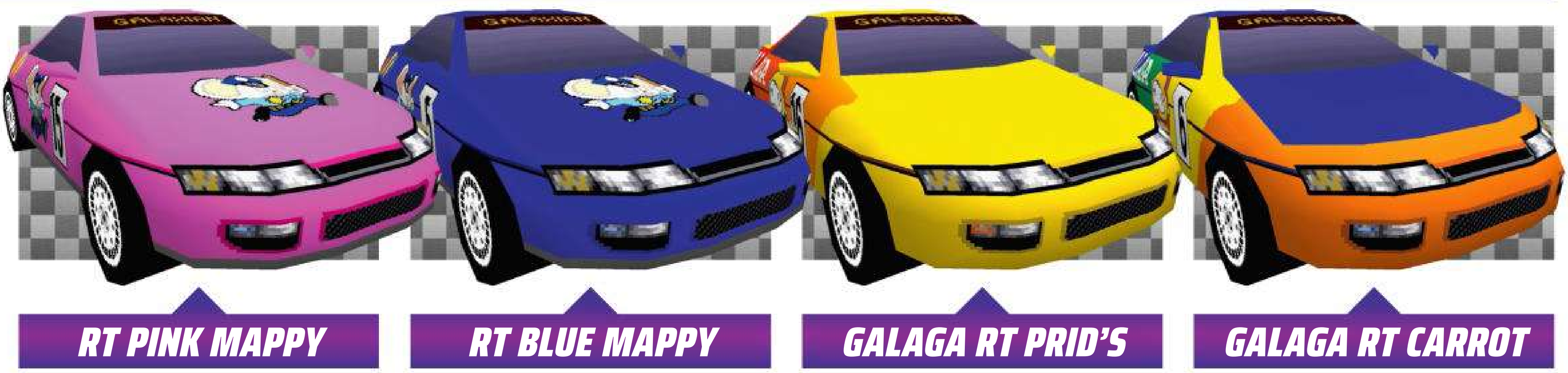
HOMING LASER

During the *Galaga '88* minigame, hold L1, R1, Select and down on the controller. Pressing the triangle button will then allow you to fire a homing laser, making it much easier to unlock the eight extra standard cars to use yourself. However, there's another surprise waiting if you do that.

RALLY-X MODE

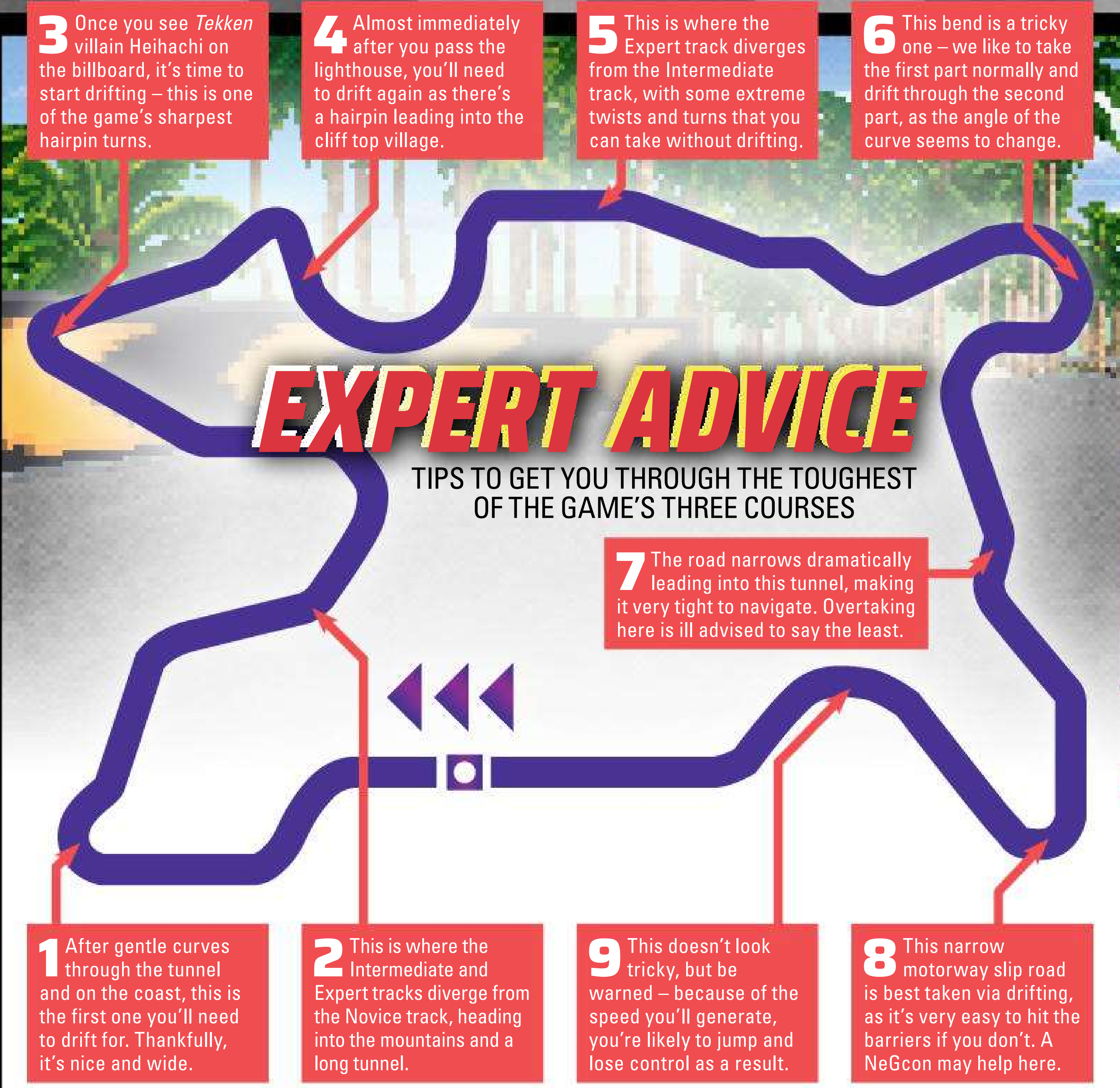


If you beat the *Galaga '88* game using the homing laser, you'll see odd cars with big wheels and squashed bodies. The commentator also goes all high pitched, which is quite amusing to hear. This mode formed the basis of Namco's arcade spin-off *Pocket Racer*, which was aimed at kids.



EXPERT ADVICE

TIPS TO GET YOU THROUGH THE TOUGHEST OF THE GAME'S THREE COURSES



3 Once you see *Tekken* villain Heihachi on the billboard, it's time to start drifting – this is one of the game's sharpest hairpin turns.

4 Almost immediately after you pass the lighthouse, you'll need to drift again as there's a hairpin leading into the cliff top village.

5 This is where the Expert track diverges from the Intermediate track, with some extreme twists and turns that you can take without drifting.

6 This bend is a tricky one – we like to take the first part normally and drift through the second part, as the angle of the curve seems to change.

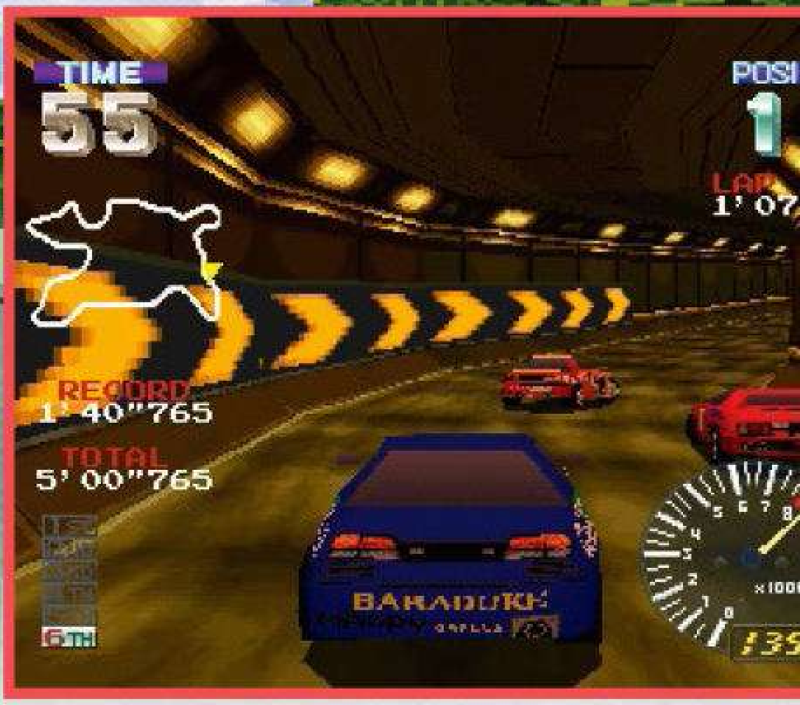
7 The road narrows dramatically leading into this tunnel, making it very tight to navigate. Overtaking here is ill advised to say the least.

1 After gentle curves through the tunnel and on the coast, this is the first one you'll need to drift for. Thankfully, it's nice and wide.

2 This is where the Intermediate and Expert tracks diverge from the Novice track, heading into the mountains and a long tunnel.

9 This doesn't look tricky, but be warned – because of the speed you'll generate, you're likely to jump and lose control as a result.

8 This narrow motorway slip road is best taken via drifting, as it's very easy to hit the barriers if you don't. A NeGcon may help here.



» [PlayStation] Tunnels once again feature heavily in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, and they can be tricky to navigate at speed.

inclusion, while *PlayStation Plus* felt that the new track was better than the original. *Maximum* praised the game as "an instantly playable arcade racer that oozes options and playability", summarising the overall view of the game when assessed in isolation.

Of course, *Ridge Racer Revolution* was not immune to criticism, largely because of the context of its release. *Edge* assessed the game as "virtually indistinguishable from its parent" and many reviewers agreed that this was a negative point. *Ultimate Future Games* highlighted the issue with an unflattering comparison to the competition, saying, "We would have expected more of an improvement. Look at *Daytona* on the Saturn, then look at *Sega Rally*. Clearly an advancement." It wasn't the only one, either – *GamesMaster* criticised the use of the link cable, asking, "Didn't *Sega Rally* manage a great two-player game using a split screen without losing any speed? Thought so. Maybe no one at Namco could manage this." *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* summarised the overall critical mood by declaring that its similarity to the original made it "undoubtedly a poor sequel," but that it was still "more of an undeniably great game".

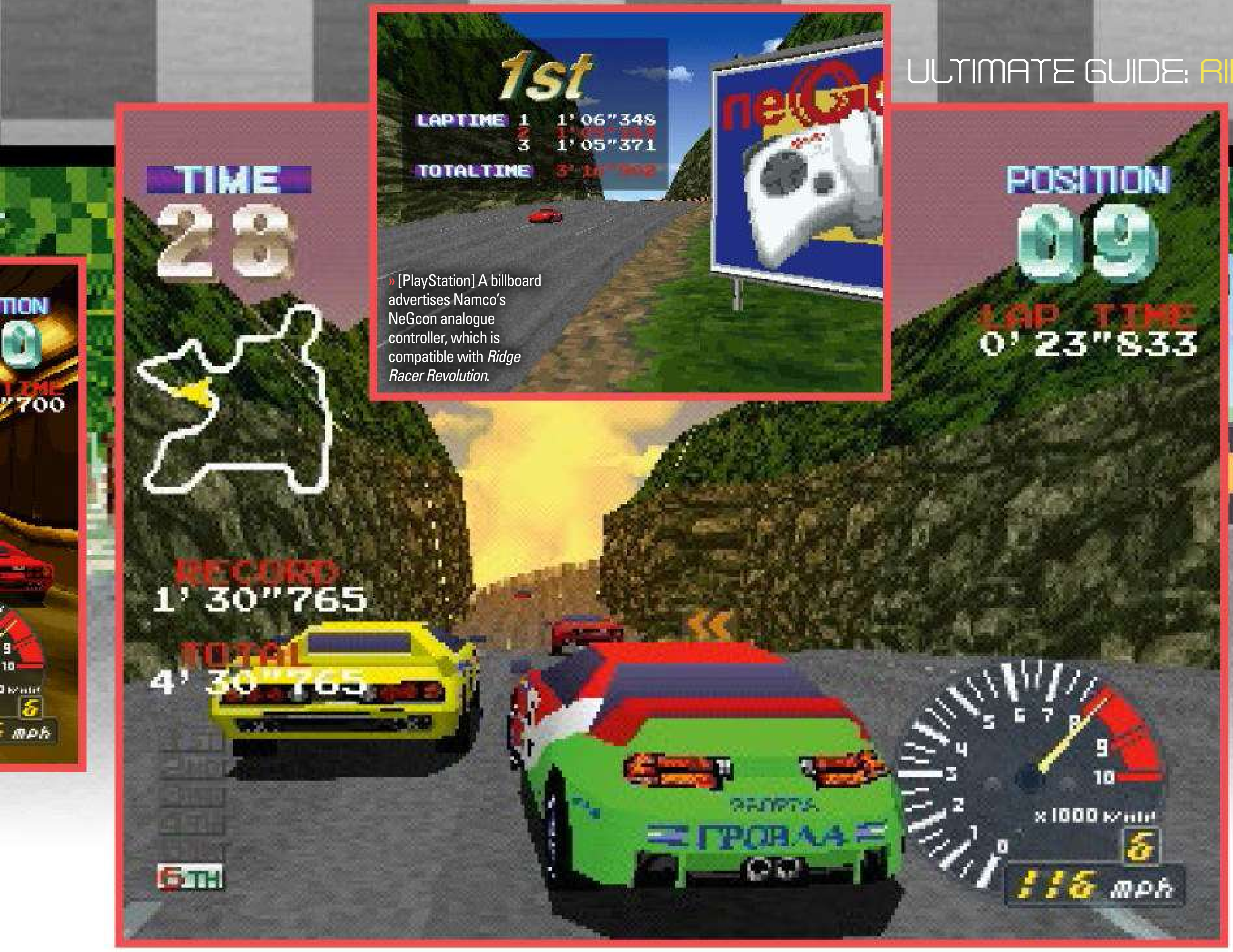
STARTING GRID

RT BOSCONIAN

RT NEBULASRAY

RT XEVIOUS RED

RT XEVIOUS GREEN



» [PlayStation] A billboard advertises Namco's NeGcon analogue controller, which is compatible with *Ridge Racer Revolution*.

» [PlayStation] It's always a pleasure to overtake the yellow Solvalou – the game's most irritating opponent

Players weren't too worried about those similarities though, and *Ridge Racer Revolution* was a big hit, selling just shy of 480,000 copies in its debut month in Japan. The game hit the top spot in the UK all-formats chart upon its debut and managed to hang around in the top ten for a few months afterwards. That earned it a place in Japanese and European PlayStation budget ranges, but despite its popularity Namco has never officially released *Ridge Racer Revolution* on any other platform. It is possible to find *Ridge Racer Revolution*'s tracks elsewhere though, as the PSP game *Ridge Racer 2* includes faithful remakes of the tracks and remixes of the game's music. Other games including *Ridge Racer 64* and *Ridge Racer 3D* also incorporate tracks based on the layouts in this game.

We're fortunate that the game was so popular, as it means that original PAL and Japanese copies of *Ridge Racer Revolution* can easily be had for under £10. Completists should note that PAL copies originally came with a sheet of stickers for your memory card. North American copies are a little more expensive on average as the game seems to have been less popular there, perhaps due to its late release. Even so, you're looking at a price range that caps out at £20, and it can easily be found for less.

Ridge Racer Revolution is another one of those games that benefits from the passage of time. Namco's bright and bold approach to driving has always been appealing but in today's gaming environment, where new arcade racers are few and far between, there's a particular joy that comes with going back to that simpler time. Where owners of *Ridge Racer* would once have had to think seriously about whether they really wanted to spend £50 on more of the same, it's a much more palatable proposition for any fan of the series at £5. So if you've not taken the wheel for a while, it's time to go back and revisit *Ridge Racer Revolution*. ✱

13TH RACING

13TH RACING KID

WHITE ANGEL

A LINK TO THE FAST

EXPLORING THE MULTIPLAYER MODE FEW GOT TO SEE

Unfortunately for most players, *Ridge Racer Revolution*'s multiplayer mode was incredibly expensive to experience – the necessary kit came in at over £700 back in the day, and that's without factoring in the cost of the TV sets. This is a real shame because racing games are always more fun with friends, and *Ridge Racer Revolution* actually saves some of its content exclusively for multiplayer mode.

Starting *Ridge Racer Revolution* with the link option enabled will give you a special notification on the attract screen, and when you start the game, it will display an arcade-style screen on both machines while the second player joins. You can race with a full pack of 12 drivers or just go against one another, and a handicap option is available. But the best bit is that as well as the main three *Ridge Racer Revolution* tracks, you get the Special 1 and Special 2 tracks from the original *Ridge Racer* too.

Now that the required setup is considerably cheaper, we'd recommend you give *Ridge Racer Revolution* multiplayer a go since it's a good deal of fun. If you like it then it's also worth knowing that *Ridge Racer Type 4* supports up to four players across two consoles.

COURSE SELECT
SPECIAL 1
TOTAL LENGTH 2.565m

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

retro GAMER
Ori and the Will of the Wisps
Zombies Ate My Neighbors
The Making of NARC
Master System Gems to Collect
Astro City Mini Hands-on

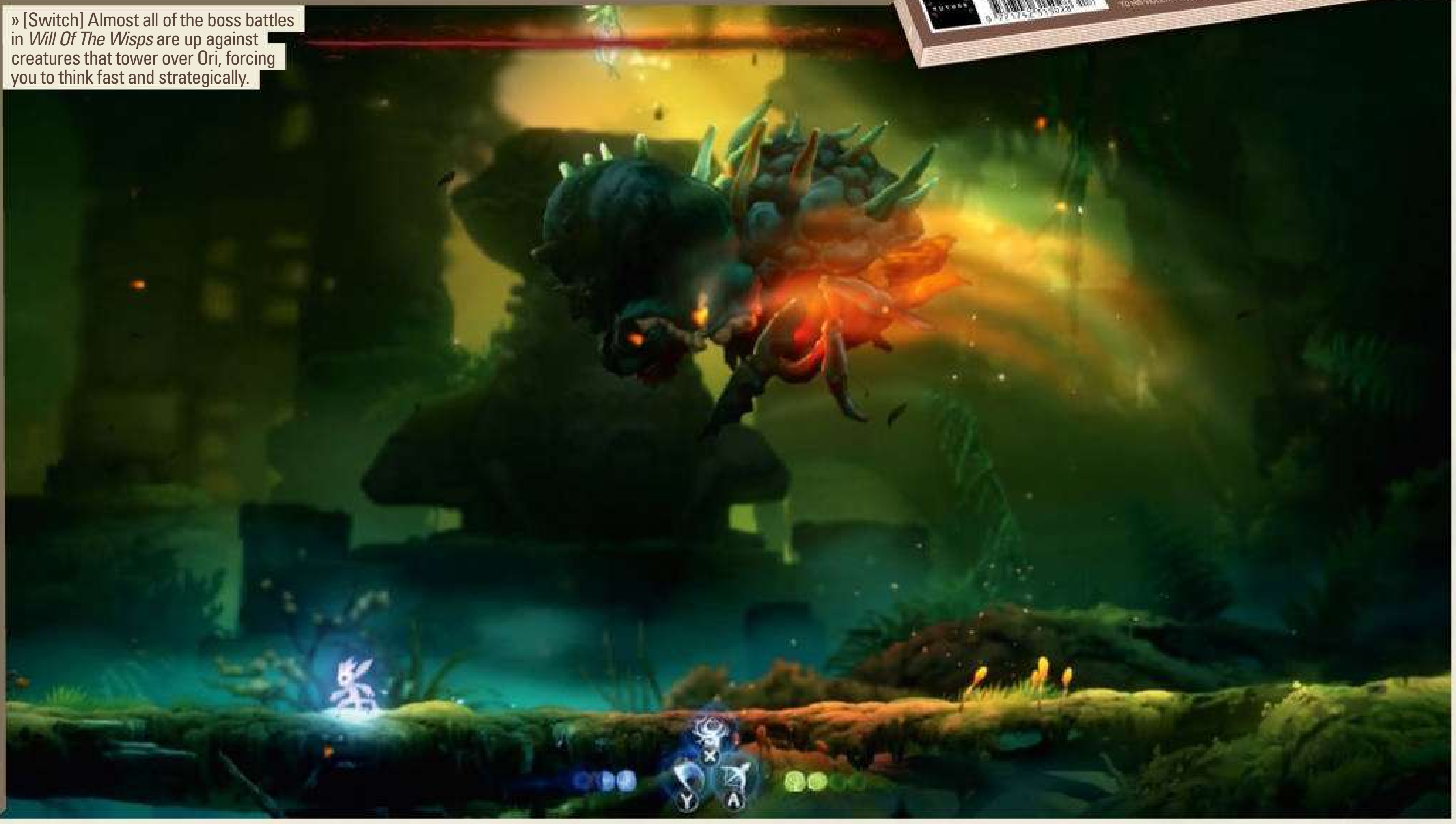
Info

- **System:** Xbox one, Various
- **Year:** 2020
- **Publisher:** Xbox Game Studios
- **Developer:** Moon Studios
- **Key People:** Thomas Mahler, Gennadiy Korol

Go Deeper

» While the Xbox One original looked great capped at 60fps, *Will Of The Wisps* now runs at double that on Xbox Series X thanks to a post-release update. Ori handles smoother than ever!

» Thomas Mahler was previously employed at Blizzard before spinning off to form an indie studio. It prototyped a first-person shooter before being inspired by *Rayman* and *Metroid* to create *Ori*.



» [Switch] Almost all of the boss battles in *Will Of The Wisps* are up against creatures that tower over Ori, forcing you to think fast and strategically.

Learn how one team full of international talent built upon the success of its first Metroidvania to reinvent the classic genre for a modern audience. Ori's follow-up journey to save a friend is magical for more reasons than one

Words by Aaron Potter

ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS

THE BACKGROUND

Before most of the global population had to make a habit of working at home, founder Thomas Mahler and the rest of the team at Moon Studios were basking in the benefits of collaborating remotely five years prior. Initially released solely for Xbox One, *Ori And The Blind Forest* was the rare example of an acclaimed console exclusive when Microsoft's fledgling ecosystem needed it most, only made possible utilising a pool of worldwide talent – far removed from the typical office structure. The result was a magical spin on the modern 2D Metroidvania format that didn't quite feel like it was from anywhere. Except maybe a storybook.

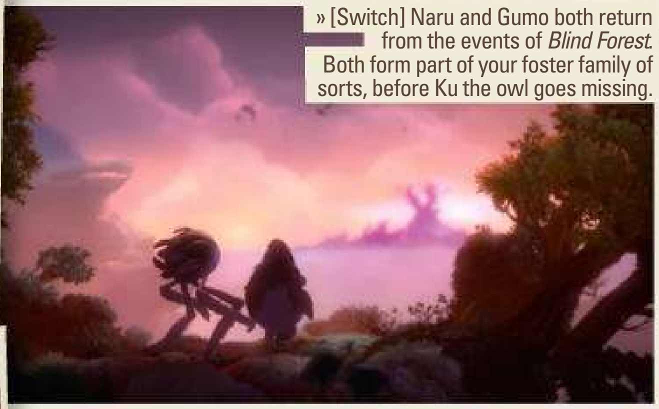
Such success, however, meant that a sequel was inevitable. As such, Xbox Game Studios greenlit what would eventually become *Ori And The Will Of The Wisps* almost immediately, giving Moon Studios the time and wherewithal to hopefully see lightning strike twice. The 2020 follow-up turned out to be three times larger in scope than the first, saw a major shift from 2D characters and environments to full 3D models, and greatly expanded combat. This was clearly the game *Ori* was always intended to be.

THE GAME

What's remarkable about *Ori And The Will Of The Wisps* is just how sprightly it is to traverse its luscious setting. Whereas Metroidvanias are traditionally about blocking off players' routes, halting their stride so as to encourage them to turn away and return later with a key item, here it doesn't matter too much due to how fun it is to get around. As a shimmering forest guardian, Ori is able to jump, swing and dash from here to there with a great sense of pace, making the act of backtracking less of a pain and rather something to look forward to.

It helps that this souped-up sequel wastes no time in gifting you with most of your key movement abilities right away. Because while it would have been

» [Switch] Slashing away at enemies using your Spirit Edge weapon is extremely satisfying. Melee combat allows for much more tactile feedback from your actions.



» [Switch] Naru and Gumo both return from the events of *Blind Forest*. Both form part of your foster family of sorts, before Ku the owl goes missing.

» [Switch] *Ori And The Will Of The Wisps* is absolutely teeming with natural wildlife to make it feel like a living world, including families of Moki.

» [Switch] Each of the marshes you visit tout a distinct look and tone, thanks to Moon Studios' varied art style and improved environmental depth.

Things of note

MAP IT OUT

The map in *Ori And The Will Of The Wisps* is roughly three times larger than the one featured in *Blind Forest*.

KWOLOK'S HOLLOW

SUITE OF SKILLS

From the game's beginning, Ori can only equip a total of three Spirit Shards at any one time. This prevents you from being overpowered.

SPIRIT SHARDS

WEAPON WHEEL

New weapons and combat manoeuvres can be purchased whenever you visit Grom. All can be accessed from a wheel, but must be assigned to one of three buttons.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

While physical editions of *Will Of The Wisps* exist on PC, Xbox One and Switch, the Switch also received a recent collection published by Skybound Games featuring the first *Ori*.

LEAD THE WAY

Another similarity *Will Of The Wisps* shares with *Hollow Knight* is the inclusion of a specific character who will sell you maps. In this case, Lupo.

Greetings, traveller! I am Lupo.
Mapmaker Extraordinaire!

easy to tease you with the prospect of a double jump for a long while, Moon Studios understood that the world is all too tempting to not let you navigate it fully as intended for long. That doesn't mean the spiritual land of Niwen isn't full of secrets, though. Far from it! Whereas *Ori And The Blind Forest* was a rewarding yet relatively straightforward affair, here you're encouraged to use your zippy skills to undertake things other than the main quest – including side missions, time trials and forest mysteries.

Will Of The Wisps isn't shy about its influences either, and it's clear various leaps were taken by Moon Studios to make it a more refined, tight-feeling Metroidvania than the 2015 endeavour. This is most evident in the game's revamped combat system, which takes a page or two from 2017 indie hit *Hollow Knight* in that there's no longer just one method of battle. Your floating companion from the first game, Sien, is no longer around, you see, so little Ori can now equip different Spirit Shards that dramatically affect your success in melee bouts. One may let you deal more damage if you're willing to sacrifice some health, while others might let you strike a tad faster. This one mechanical tweak suddenly opens up a lot more potential whenever you face an enemy, so much so that battling them can be a puzzle in its own right.

Armed with your trusty Spirit Edge light sword, there's a tactility to fighting that didn't exist previously. It only increases once Ori gains access to a bow, Spear Of Light and the myriad other weapons (should you choose to buy them). *Will Of The Wisps* is as flexible as you want it to be, both in its exploration and now its combat, and it achieves this without ever feeling overwhelming. If you do happen to get lost on your mission to rescue your owl friend, though, rest easy knowing that each area you visit is full of natural wildlife waiting to guide you.

Unfortunately for Ori, but exhilarating for players, not every critter you meet will be friendly to you. This is a sequel to *Blind Forest*, after all, and though one of its few criticisms were the tough chase/escape sequences, they return in full force here to create several cinematic set piece moments. Will you fail them the first time? Almost certainly – especially since most require a perfect execution of the traversal skills you've learned up until that point. However, a newly added autosave feature aids in taking out the sting. In all these ways and more, this second outing is more liberating.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Ori And The Will Of The Wisps is your classic case of building upon an already great foundation to create an experience that is near exceptional. The refined combat, save system and increased reasons to explore all add to what it means to flow through the wonders of the forest as an ethereal spirit rather than take away. The fact that it manages to do all this without ever becoming impenetrable for either new and classic Metroidvania fans is nothing short of amazing. It's the purest example yet of how the genre should be handled by a team who grew up with it, paying tribute to what has come before while being unafraid to try new things.

Combine this ethos with a beautiful art style, silky smooth 60fps on both Xbox and Nintendo Switch, and Gareth Coker's hauntingly magical score, and *Will Of The Wisps* deserves the Future Classic moniker as it's a near perfect sequel. *

THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE TWO TOWERS

HUDSON PIEHL

JASON EPPS

SCOTT EVANS

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** EA GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** STORMFRONT STUDIOS
- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** PS2, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** ACTION

IN ANTICIPATION OF ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS MOVIE TRILOGIES OF ALL TIME, STORMFRONT STUDIOS SOUGHT TO CAPTURE THE CLIMATIC FEEL OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS IN THE FIRST GAME BASED ON PETER JACKSON'S VISION. WE FIND OUT HOW IT WAS ACHIEVED

WORDS BY AARON POTTER

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ANDRETTI RACING
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1996

LEGEND OF ALAN D'AR
SYSTEM: PS2
YEAR: 2001

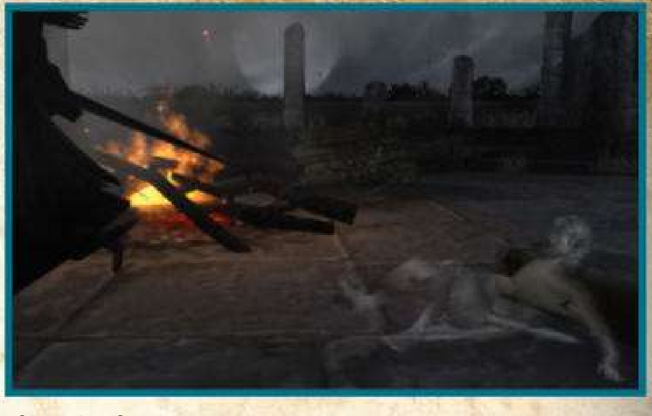
FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, PS2, XBOX
YEAR: 2004

For most fans of Tolkien's literary masterwork there exists two moments in time: the period before Peter Jackson's epic movie trilogy graced the silver screen, and the period after. All three movies were considered a cinematic triumph upon release, affectionately breathing life into the world of Middle-earth unlike other adaptations had previously been able. *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return Of The King* all did justice to one simple hobbit's journey to ensure good triumphed over evil. Jackson's vision has gone on to influence a whole gamut of high-fantasy fiction in the two decades since. It was only a matter of time, therefore, until *The Lord Of The Rings* made the jump to videogames. But imagine trying to do so before a single frame had been filmed.

This was the exact situation EA Partners' Scott Evans found himself in circa 1999, when the publisher had learned of New Line Cinema's plans to adapt *The Lord Of The Rings* into three movies. "We were huge fans of the book and Peter Jackson's work so we were immediately interested," says Scott regarding those early days. "[New Line] sent a copy of the scripts which we devoured – we were blown away by what we read so it was an easy creative decision to sign the rights. Within EA we excitedly proclaimed to execs that we had found the next *Star Wars*."

Upon seeing those stars potentially align, Scott and the rest of the EA Partners subdivision got to work trying to find a suitable developer to make the game. They eventually arrived at Stormfront Studios, a team that was (up until that point) primarily known for sports games. Ranging from annual *Madden* ports for the PC, to a line of *NASCAR* games for the PlayStation and a suite of Tony La Russa licensed baseball titles, the California-based studio already had an established relationship with EA. However, it was the team's work on action RPG *The Legend Of Alon D'ar* that most caught the publisher's attention.

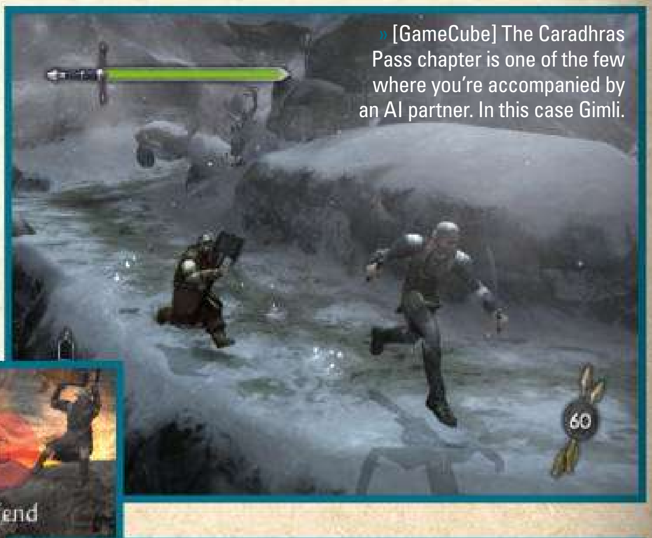
"At the time, *The Legend Of Alon D'ar* was in development and the technology and storytelling approach was compelling," says Stormfront's Hudson Piehl, who would eventually become project director on the official *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* videogame. "That, our success managing the sport titles and our proximity to EA's headquarters were positives in the studio's favour." *The Legend Of Alon D'ar* would only go on to receive a mixed critical reception, but greater things were in store for Stormfront's next release. Even if it meant bucking the trend for how people viewed movie tie-in games at the time.



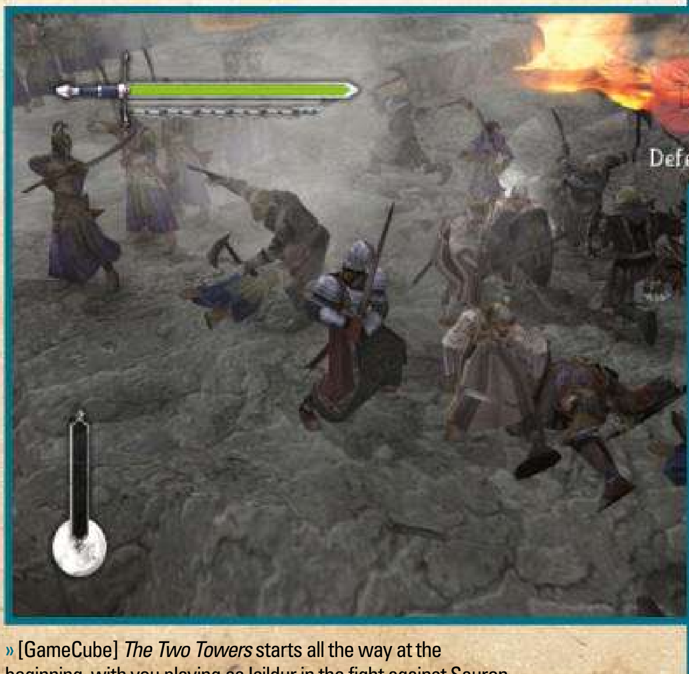
» [GameCube] You may not get to play as Frodo, but *Two Towers* accurately depicts the ring's ability to turn him invisible.

"WE WERE HUGE FANS OF THE BOOK AND PETER JACKSON'S WORK SO WE WERE IMMEDIATELY INTERESTED"
SCOTT EVANS

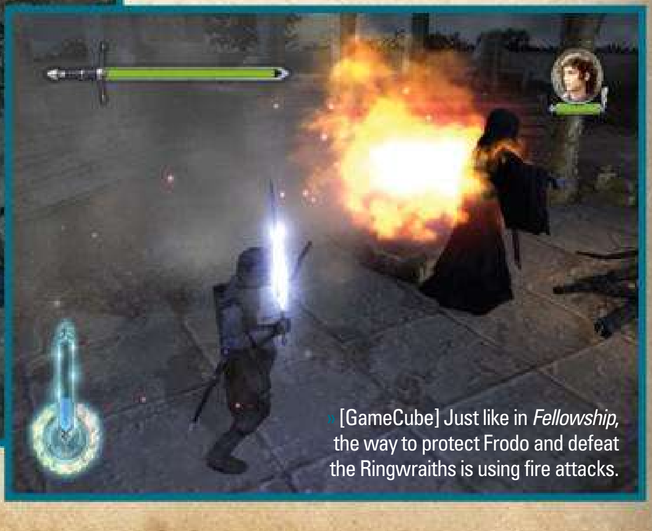
Official work on *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* began incredibly early; almost a year before *The Fellowship Of The Ring* would arrive in cinemas, in fact. Having so much runway, though, led to a tricky situation for Stormfront: how do you create a game based on a set of movies that haven't been released yet? The studio had unprecedented access to certain film elements, such as the aforementioned script and storyboards, but even this wasn't enough to recreate specific character moments and set pieces to the extent that they'd be recognisable to moviegoers. ▶



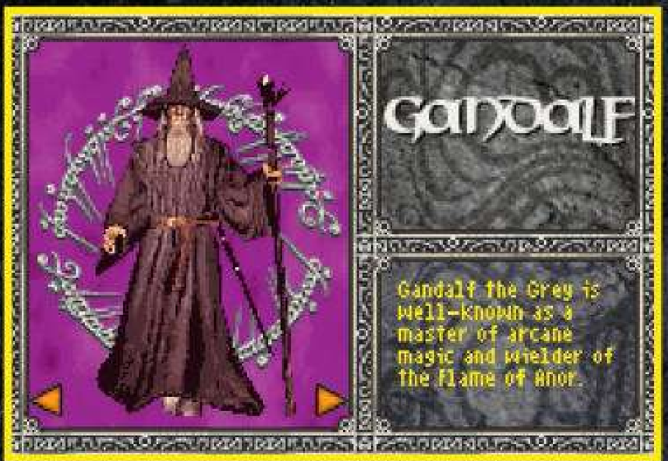
» [GameCube] The Caradhras Pass chapter is one of the few where you're accompanied by an AI partner. In this case Gimli.



» [GameCube] *The Two Towers* starts all the way at the beginning, with you playing as Isildur in the fight against Sauron.



[GameCube] Just like in *Fellowship*, the way to protect Frodo and defeat the Ringwraiths is using fire attacks.



GANDALF

Gandalf the Grey is well-known as a master of arcane magic and wielder of the flame of Anor.

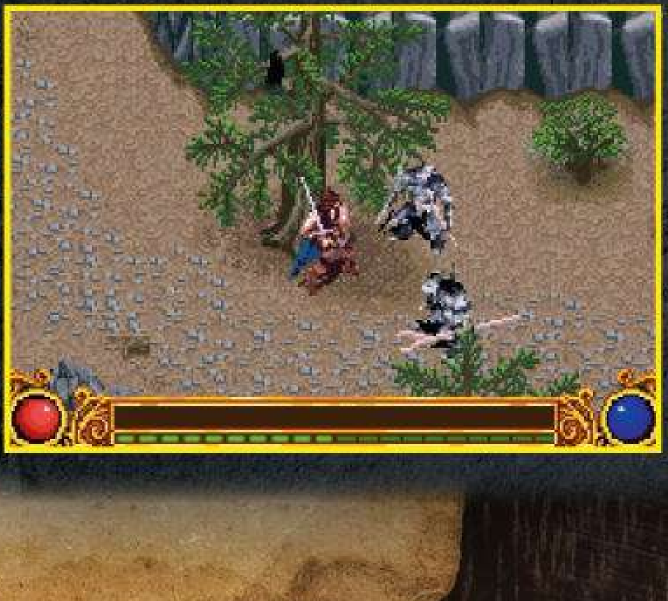
BIG BATTLES MINIATURISED

FOLLOWING THE EPIC FANTASY ADVENTURE ON GAME BOY ADVANCE

Taking place from a top-down isometric perspective, the GBA version of *Two Towers* was handled by Griptonite Games and is a very different kind of action RPG to the one enjoyed by players on PS2, Xbox and GameCube. For one, it features slightly more playable characters than what is seen in the home console version, with Aragorn able to summon the help of Gimli, Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, a great eagle and so on. There's also the inclusion of a loot system, wherein the different gear you come across can raise your character's damage, critical hit chance and defence stats.

The combat does suffer from being a bit too button-mashy as a result of the GBA's limited controls, but the promise of upgrading your equipment helps keep you interested. Much of your time is spent travelling from location to location, hunting down items and engaging in combat encounters. Some of the latter can be tough when enemies start to swarm. However, you can always sacrifice mana to replenish your health in true fantasy RPG fashion.

The game's pixel art is surprisingly smooth, though, even today. Characters like Gandalf look great while roaming the likes of Amon Hen and Caradhras Pass when battling orcs and devilish birds. Equally impressive is how well Howard Shore's iconic soundtrack from the film has been adapted. It's still extremely recognisable in the chiptune format that pipes out of the GBA's modest speakers, and is indicative of Griptonite's eagerness to immerse you in Middle-earth despite the smaller format.



CHOOSE YOUR HERO

FIGHT FOR THE FELLOWSHIP AS ARAGORN, GIMLI OR LEGOLAS

GIMLI

Gimli's short stature is more than made up for by the amount of damage he can let loose using his trademark axe right from the very off. The large arc of his swing makes him a good choice for dealing with groups and enemy clusters, while his throwing axes are just OK unless upgraded later.

ARAGORN

As the one true king of man and Isildur's proper heir, Aragorn handles like an ideal mixture of both speed and brawn. His ability to pack a punch with his sword makes him good for up-close bouts, yes, but equally his archery skills are there for when you need to punish orcs from a distance. A great all-rounder.

LEGOLAS

Featuring the grace and accuracy you'd typically associate with an elf, Legolas is most dangerous when unleashing arrows at range (and not just because he carries double the amount Aragorn can). His quick attacks using his two long white knives don't render him as much of a melee master compared to the others, though he'll get the job done.

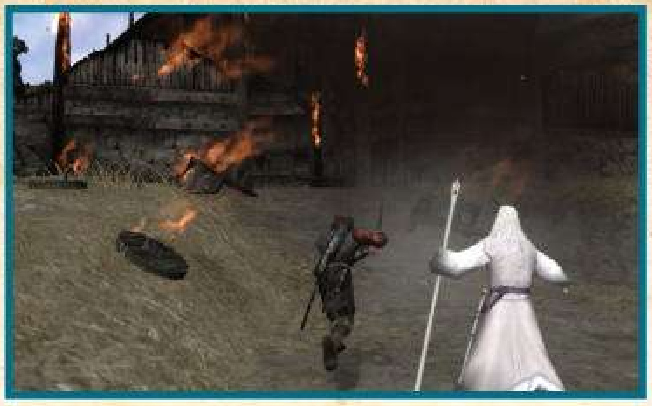
» [GameCube] Most of the trilogy's actors lent their voices to Stromfront's game, adding to its authenticity.

» [GameCube] The developers initially didn't know what Wargs looked like until close to when the movie was nearing completion.

▶ This led the game's initial design to start off as a combination of the film and books. Until it was made clear that, even with over a year's prep, it'd be impossible to launch a videogame alongside Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*. "We realised early on, we couldn't come out with the first movie," notes lead designer Jason Epps, "so we aimed for release with the second film in the series." This extra breathing room would allow Stormfront to incorporate elements from both *Fellowship* and *The Two Towers* into its game. Hudson concurs, "Clearly all the material we were going to receive during year one was going to be from the first film. It seemed obvious to take advantage of all that material, so the game became a blend of both."

Such circumstances explain why, despite explicitly being named *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers*, the game begins all the way back during the first film's prologue. Recreating events that take place ahead of Frodo's journey to take the ring from Bag End to Mordor, players learn the combat basics while playing as Isildur – punctuated by Cate Blanchett's hauntingly epic narration, directly lifted from the movie. Starting here may have baffled players who purchased the game expecting to begin with Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli's Uruk-hai pursuit, but it certainly made for a bombastic opening that could suitably attract players both new and familiar.

For as rocky a reputation as licensed games had, the turn of the millennium marked a time where movie studios were willing to work closer with developers than they ever had done. Warner Bros had given free rein to Atari for its work with *Enter The Matrix*, for instance, and the same could be said for EA and Stormfront's time developing *The Two Towers*. As Scott recalls, "In our first meeting with Peter he talked about his favourite games including *Medal Of Honor*. I remember how he described his fascination with Tolkien's description of the Mines Of Moria – he was captivated by the idea that a person could get lost within the vastness of it and perhaps never emerge."



» [GameCube] Gandalf appears to briefly assist you. However, he wouldn't be playable until the sequel.

Everyone who spoke with the film's crew or eventually got around to seeing the first movie agreed with Jackson that Moria would make for a great sequence in the game. This resulted in a chapter that would see players battle it out against legions of unending orcs and the infamous cave-troll while exploring Balin's Tomb. Unfortunately, for as excellently as the in-game adaptation came across, Hudson says there was originally more to it. "One element that was painful to cut was an imagined level based on the Balrog sequence in the Mines Of Moria. The scene is visually stunning and the art team had spent a great deal of time on the Balrog, which you can imagine is very difficult to render on a PS2. We all felt for them when we had to cut the idea because of the tight schedule."

"WE USED 2D SPRITES IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE BATTLES TO GIVE THE ILLUSION OF SCALE"
SCOTT EVANS

Cuts aside, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* ended up being an accurate translation of the trilogy's first two movies. Players get to fight as the three main heroes in Aragorn, the elf Legolas and dwarf Gimli, hacking away and shooting arrows against hordes of enemies using simple but effective hack-and-slash combat. Keeping things interesting, however, was the slight difference in dynamics found amongst the three, in addition to an RPG-lite levelling-up system that would let players unlock new skills and more complex combos.

Helping to separate the game's combat from other hack-and-slashers a little was the built-in feedback system, which would grade players' kills from 'Fair' to 'Perfect'. Much like how Gollum first came across the ring of power, Jason Epps came up with the idea in perhaps the unlikeliest of places. "I was playing a lot of *The Addam's Family* pinball," he reveals, "and loved how unskilled players could feel good playing it by getting points, and yet more skilled players could show their mastery through point totals that were radically higher. Later I came to call this concept additive as opposed to punitive game design: reward players but also reward players who show mastery exponentially."

All three of the game's playable characters handle similarly, but it was still important for Stormfront to demonstrate the different strengths found in each through gameplay. Legolas being an elf may dish out lighter attacks but is swifter on his feet. Gimli, meanwhile, like his weapon of choice, handles a bit more like a battle axe. Then you have Aragorn, who is a great all-rounder and a competent mixture of the two.

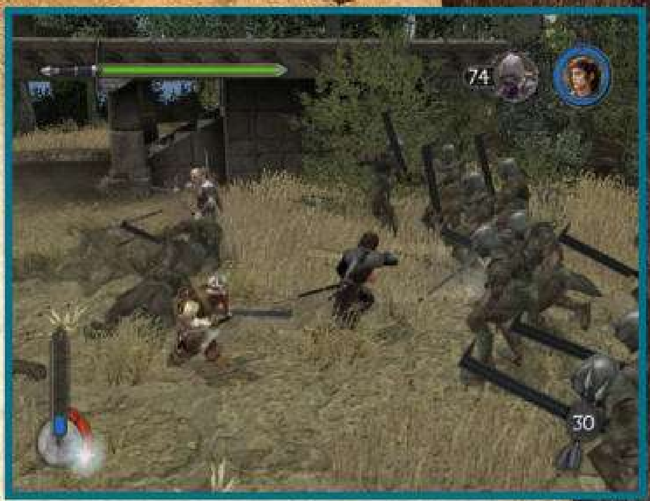
"Our simple creative vision for the gameplay of *The Two Towers* was '*Golden Axe* meets *The Lord Of The Rings*,'" expresses Scott. "Anyone who remembers this classic Sega brawler will recall that there were three characters who each had unique fighting styles, which made the game super fun to play over and over." Achieving this balance still posed its challenges, as both Jason and Hudson agree that Gimli was the toughest to make interesting. "Legolas is obvious with his bow and ranged attacks," reveals the latter. "Gimli was harder, so we focused on his enormous strength versus Aragorn's finesse."

With such direct access to Jackson, Howard Shore's triumphant score and all the character's original voice cast returning, *The Two Towers* never struggled to stay authentic. You only need to look at how it managed to capture the scale of the now iconic Helm's Deep battle for evidence of this, which ended up forming the game's three end chapters. Stormfront had the difficulty of depicting Saruman's 10,000 strong army of orcs and Uruk-hai on PS2/Gamecube era tech, which inspired the studio's engineers to input some extremely creative workarounds.

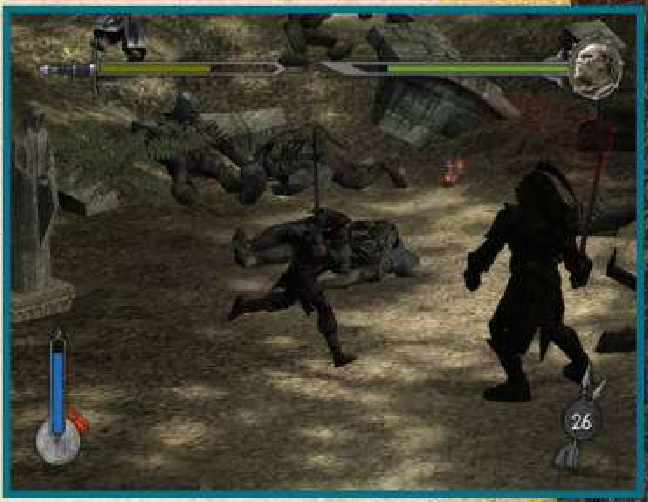
"We used 2D sprites in the background of the battles to give the illusion of scale," says Scott. "These sprites had no geometry so they didn't consume much rendering overhead. We filled the screen with them which provided the illusion that thousands of enemies were attacking." Speaking specifically to the Helm's Deep battle, "These sprites made it feel as if a horde of Uruk-hai were attacking the fortress and that it was about to be overrun at any moment despite the heroic efforts of the player." Even today, the transition from film cutscenes straight to action is astonishingly effective. "Many elements in the background are simple animating sprites but give the illusion of depth," Hudson sums up.

The Two Towers was – and still is – held up as one of the very best examples of a movie tie-in game. Having launched on 21 October 2002, a full two months before the film version, it gave diehard fans an effective way of role-playing as their favourite characters. They could also briefly inhabit Middle-earth's richness at a time when games based on Jackson's interpretation were few and far between. Is it any wonder, then, that there are constant calls for a remake? "A dinosaur like me will gladly play it," jokes Hudson.

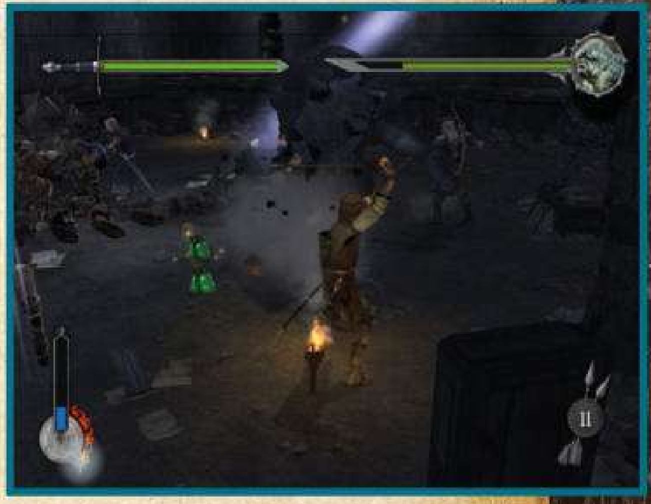
Due to timing restrictions and the ambition to go bigger, EA ultimately decided to handle development on *The Return Of The King*'s tie-in game internally at Redwood Shores. Despite this, all those involved think back to their experience making the game fondly. "It didn't matter that some of us were from EA and some were from Stormfront," concludes Scott. "We sat together, ate together, and strived together to make something awesome that we'd be proud of. Myself and Hudson were completely dedicated to the idea of 'one team' and we strove to make that happen." *



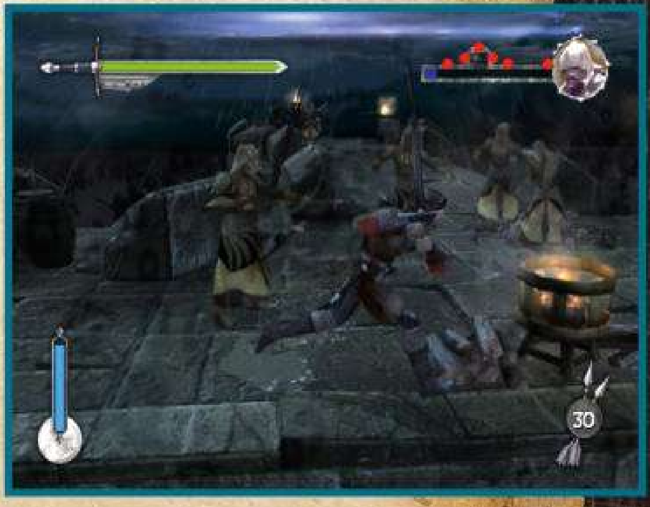
» [GameCube] Uruk-hai enemies differ to orcs, in that they require heavy attacks to be taken down.



» [GameCube] Lurtz went and killed Boromir, so there's no surprise he was elevated to the status of boss battle.



» [GameCube] Taking down the hulking cave-troll requires more than a simple arrow to the knee.



» [GameCube] Stormfront relied on technical workarounds involving 2D background sprites to achieve the large sense of scale seen in the impressive Helm's Deep sequence.

Hardware Heaven

Xbox 360

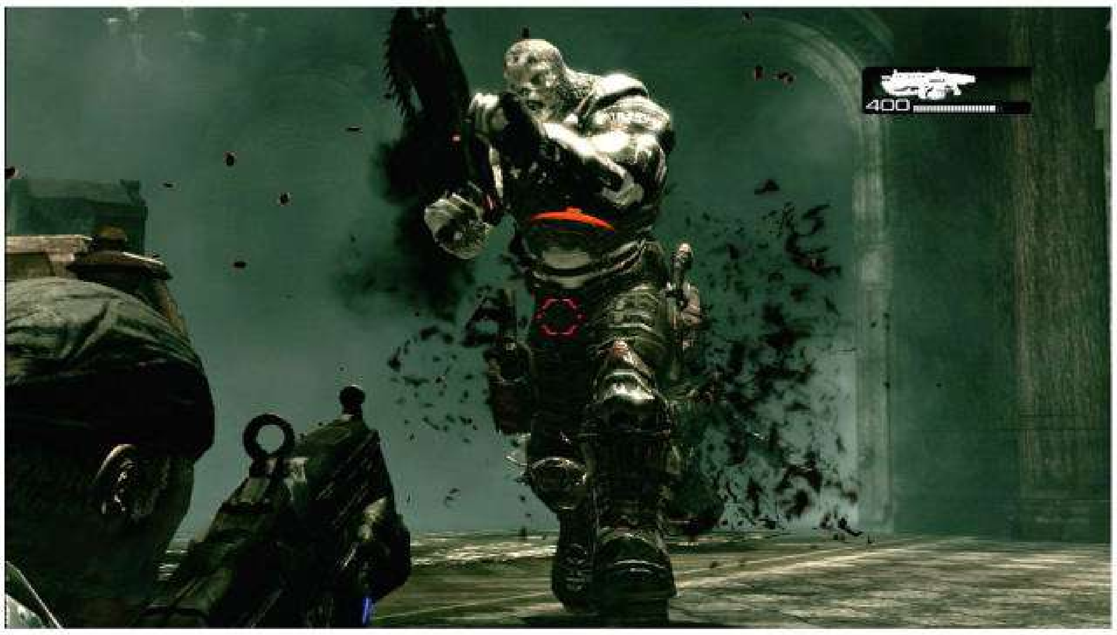
» MANUFACTURER: Microsoft **» YEAR:** 2005
» COST: £279.99 (Premium) / £209.99 (Core) (launch), £25+ (today, boxed), £10+ (today, unboxed)

The original Xbox gave Microsoft a foothold in the console market, but its successor was the company's true breakthrough. Where the Xbox had been released later than the PlayStation 2 and cost more, the Xbox 360 arrived a year ahead of the PlayStation 3 and was considerably cheaper. Players were convinced by a strong first year of games including *Gears Of War*, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *Dead Rising*, and gave Microsoft a sales advantage over Sony that held for most of the generation. These strong sales attracted the widespread Japanese publisher support that the original Xbox had lacked, despite the console's failure to appeal to Japanese players.

Roughly as chunky as the original Xbox, but rather less ostentatious, the Xbox 360's initial design is most interesting on a technical level. The USB ports were hidden because wireless was the future, but memory card slots remained. High-definition gameplay were the goal, but the console lacked an HDMI port. However, the nastiest surprise was under the hood where poor heat management would cause solder joints to crack, resulting in the infamous 'Red Ring Of Death' – a problem that resulted in a repair scheme that cost Microsoft over $1 billion. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME
Gears Of War

If you were going to associate the Xbox brand with anything, a hulking military man with a big gun is a likely choice. While Master Chief certainly did the business on the 360 later on, *Gears Of War* was arguably the first game to really showcase the console's graphical grunt. It also didn't hurt that it was a wonderfully well-constructed action game. While the cover shooting wasn't revolutionary, the over-the-top violence you could inflict with your Lancer – an assault rifle with a chainsaw attached – was always incredibly satisfying, whether you were playing through the campaign or in multiplayer.



Memory Unit A
Memory Unit B
XBOX 360
XBOX 360

Xbox 360 fact

■ Core and Arcade consoles without hard disks had a matte plastic finish on their DVD drives, while systems including 20GB or 60GB hard disks used chrome. Elite consoles were black and chrome with 120GB hard disks.

PROCESSOR: 64-BIT IBM XENON POWERPC CPU (TRIPLE CORE, 3.2GHZ)

GRAPHICS: CUSTOM ATI XENOS GPU (500MHZ, 240 GFLOPS)

RAM: 512MB SHARED GDDR3 RAM

MEDIA: DVD-ROM (UP TO 8.5GB, 7.9GB USABLE)

STORAGE: OPTIONAL HARD DISK WITH CUSTOM CONNECTOR

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

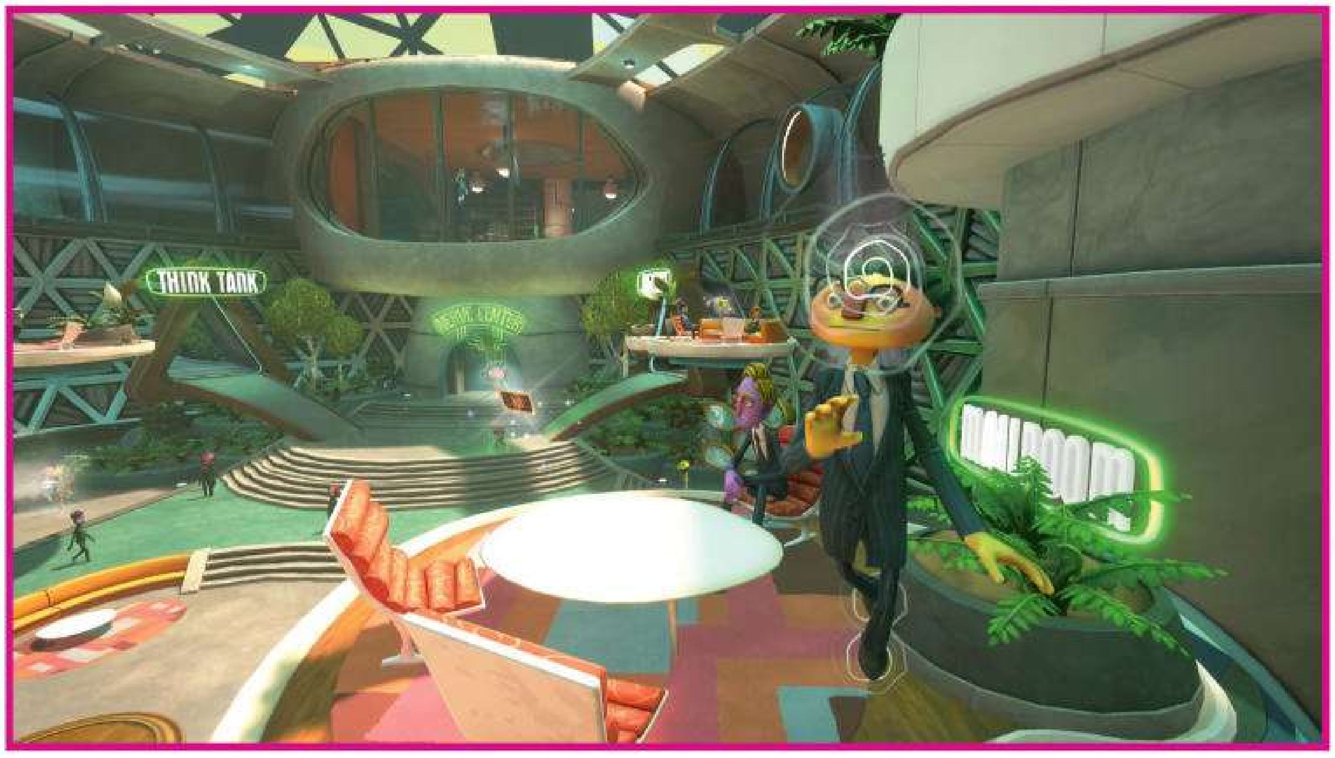
THE HISTORY OF

PSYCHONAUTS

MORE THAN 15 YEARS IN THE MAKING, DOUBLE FINE'S PSYCHONAUTS 2 RECENTLY LANDED TO THUNDEROUS OVATION FROM FANS AND CRITICS ALIKE. INDUSTRY LEGEND, TIM SCHAFER GUIDES US THROUGH THE STORIED SAGA BEHIND THE BELOVED PLATFORMING SERIES

WORDS BY HARETH AL BUSTANI

» Tim Schafer has created a number of acclaimed games, including *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*.

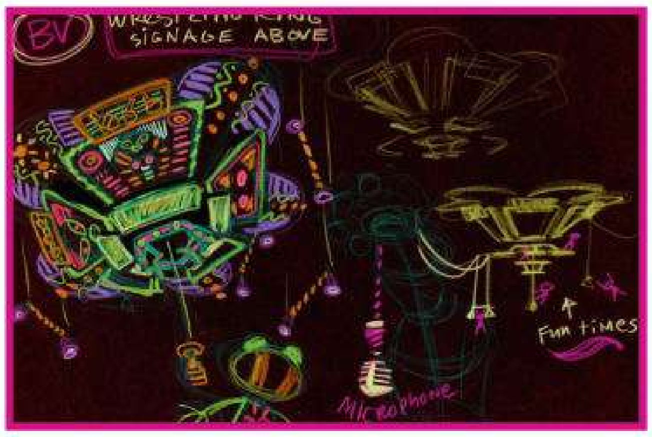


» [PC] The Motherlobe is the Psychonauts' headquarters, and serves as a base of operations in *Psychonauts 2*, with numerous collectibles hidden in its brainy bowels.

When Tim Schafer walked away from LucasArts in 2000, having just released the great swan song of adventure gaming, *Grim Fandango*, he'd already established himself as one of the most brilliant minds in the business. However, he was just getting started. After setting up his own company, Double Fine, he set the wheels in motion on a game that had been brewing for years.

The project was rooted in Tim's long-time fascination with psychology. He recalls, "I studied dreams in college, and thinking about how people represent emotional states in abstract imagery and metaphors, especially in their sleep, was always interesting to me." Years prior, he'd even briefly considered working these ideas into the legendary point-and-click title, *Full Throttle*. "In *Full Throttle*, I wanted to have this interactive peyote trip where Ben would take peyote in the desert and then wander through his own mind; kind of like Jim Morrison in *The Doors* movie – where he just goes off into the desert and tries to see the elephant. What could that mean? That kind of symbolism was really fun." Although that particular idea "didn't really seem to fit within *Full Throttle*", Tim held onto it.

> "IT CAME FROM BRAINSTORMING OVER ALL THE GREAT PSYCHIC POWERS THAT PEOPLE FANTASISE ABOUT HAVING, AND HOW YOU COULD MAKE PUZZLES OUT OF THAT"
>
> **TIM SCHAFER**



» [PC] Tim says coming up with ideas for the first game was easy, "I'd never seen black velvet in a videogame before."

Later, while working on an unrealised spy game (supposedly a cross between *Shaft*, *James Bond*, kung-fu cinema and *2001: A Space Odyssey*) he returned to the idea; designing a mechanic where gamers could meditate on objects in order to experience visions about them, and gain clues about their significance. "I was pitching that around to people and later someone was like, 'Hey, what about that game where you go into other people's minds?', and I was like, 'Oh no, you go into your own mind. But wait a second … that's better! So, I just started ruminating on that for years."

Once Tim was at the helm of Double Fine, what began as a misunderstanding over who explored whose mind, started to snowball into a fully realised world of its own. The resultant project was *Psychonauts*, a platform game where players use psychic explorers to travel through levels, set within other characters' minds. "It came from brainstorming over all the great psychic powers that people fantasise about having, and how you could make puzzles out of that," continues Tim. "And then, thinking about different types of minds; like, 'Oh I just met someone who seems like a narcissist, what would their mind look like? Would it all look like them? What colour would the sky be in their world?'"

Tim enlisted the help of art director Scott Campbell, and LucasArts alumni Peter Chan, the concept artist who'd worked on both *Grim Fandango* and *Full Throttle*, to develop a visual language. While Scott set about illustrating ideas for characters, Peter recently said in the *20 Double Fine Years* book, "My kids were little at the time and I was reading a lot of J Otto Siebold books, and they became an inspiration, as did *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Both of those have this whimsical style that I could reference alongside Scott's characters." Scott would ▶

POWER-UP!

HERE'S A RUNDOWN OF OUR FAVOURITE PSI-POWERS

TELEKINESIS

Raz can use Telekinesis to raise objects and hurl them around using his mind. The power takes the form of a psychic hand which plucks whatever, or whoever, Raz wishes to rag doll, and throws them around with glee.

CLAIRVOYANCE

Raz can use Clairvoyance to see through other people's eyes, either directly, or through one of their more meaningful belongings. Amazingly, if the player looks at Raz, his character model is replaced with a series of unique 2D images, representing how he's perceived.

PSI BLAST

Quite simply, the PSI Blast, or Marksmanship, is the act of firing laser beams out of one's cranium. Raz can either shoot at will, or lock onto targets to make life a little easier.

PYROKINESIS

Not something to be trifled with, Pyrokinesis is the art of setting things on fire using your mind. The power, which needs to charge up, features a thermometer, which eventually turns red, signalling it's time to raise the heat.

LEVITATION

One of the more frequently used powers, this creates a Levitation Ball, which Raz can ride atop, lift objects with, and even use as a parachute.

MENTAL PROJECTION

Using Mental Projection, Raz can summon a Jungian archetype, able to fit itself into tiny little spaces, distract enemies during fights and even heal Raz with a Mental Energy boost.

MENTAL CONNECTION

Using Mental Connection, Psychonauts can use a psychic grappling hook to link thoughts together, influencing someone's decision-making. It also allows players to quickly traverse, by catapulting between thoughts and enemies to otherwise unreachable spots.

draw characters over and over, dozens of times, until he was happy with them.

Before long, the team had a working concept; the game would follow Razputin 'Raz' Aquato, a young circus acrobat, in his efforts to join an international team of psychic spies called the Psychonauts. After Raz sneaks into the Whispering Rock training camp, he's shocked to learn that one of his trainers, Coach Oleander has lost the plot and hired a mad dentist-scientist to kidnap several Psychonauts and trainees. Their plan is to steal the psychics' brains, and use them to power an army of psychic death tanks, before taking over the world. Raz must save the day – not by leaving a path of destruction in his wake – but by entering the minds of his friends and enemies, and help heal them from within.

With the concept in place, Double Fine doubled down on level design. Each stage would be entirely unlike any other, reflecting a variety of intricate psychological themes, representing the states of each character's psyche. Every level featured a brand-new art style, with an immense range of unique textures, models and characters. Raz would navigate his way through these, simultaneously solving elaborate puzzles with an array of psychic abilities, ranging from Telekinesis to Clairvoyance. At the end of each stage, players would face a psychological 'boss' fight, resulting in the resolution of that character's trauma.

Bafflingly, as groundbreaking as the concept was, trying to get a game about dreams funded was a nightmare. Tim reflects on his time pitching the working demos to publishers, "The most telling thing was when someone from one of the publishers said, 'Oh wow, that's really cool, that's very creative! It's just too bad people aren't publishing creative stuff these days.'" The trouble was, that's exactly what Double Fine was all about.

"WE LIKED TO MAKE GAMES THAT MADE PEOPLE FEEL A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE"
TIM SCHAFER

"We liked to make games that made people feel a little uncomfortable, because they hadn't seen anything like it before – but, if they gave it a chance, they'd really like it." While the 54-year-old Double Fine 'head honcho' says he didn't really know how to go about finding a publisher at first, he "lucked out", after watching Bill Gates announce the Xbox at the Game Developers Conference. "Later, I gave a talk on character design and Ed Fries from Microsoft and Xbox was there – we started talking and I started pitching *Psychonauts*. Ed always seemed the most supportive of games as art." Although Xbox backed out of plans to launch *Psychonauts* as an Xbox premier title, publisher Majesco swooped in to save the day.

While critics and gamers were blown away by *Psychonauts*' stunning originality and level design, it was somewhat of a commercial disappointment. But, amazingly, having sold just 480,000 copies

MEET THE CAST

PSYCHONAUTS' DIZZYING ARRAY OF DAMAGED PSYCHICS

LILI ZANOTTO

Daughter of the Grand Head of the Psychonauts, Truman Zanotto, despite always skipping class, Lili is a naturally gifted psychic. Although she generally prefers the company of plants to people, she falls in love with Raz, before going on to work at Psychonauts headquarters, known as the Motherlobe.

DR CALIGOSTO LOBOTO

A mad unlicensed dentist and scientist, Loboto loves tugging teeth and experimenting on fish. As a child, when his parents discovered he had psychic abilities, they forced him to undergo an ice pick lobotomy. Despite conducting some seriously nefarious schemes involving the mutant Lungfish and Brain Tanks, Raz later helps him retrieve his moral compass.

RAZ

The undisputed star of *Psychonauts* is Razputin 'Raz' Aquato, a young psychic who has risen through the ranks to become a junior Psychonaut. Raised in a family of circus performers, he boasts remarkable acrobatic abilities, bolstered by immense psychic abilities. Most importantly, his kind-hearted, optimistic and determined demeanour make him uniquely suited to help others resolve their inner conflicts.

COACH OLEANDER

Having watched his butcher father kill his pet bunny as a child, Oleander was later barred from entering the military for being too short. A drill sergeant-style coach at Whispering Rock Psychic Summer Camp, he is later driven mad, enlisting the support of Dr Caligosto Loboto to take over the world, before being guided back by Raz.

between 2005 and 2010, in the next five years that number blew up to 1.2 million, making it a sleeper hit. Even as Double Fine went from strength to strength, with Tim leaping from one creative powerhouse to the next, Raz and the gang remained entrenched deep within his mind. "There were years where I never thought about it, but I did open a little document when we were shipping *Psychonauts*, because we kept having ideas for levels, like the idea of a level set in a gambler's mind. Even back in 2005, I was like, 'Yes, I've got to do that someday,' so I started writing down these little ideas."

There was certainly no shortage of them; people were always coming up to Tim with concepts for *Psychonauts* levels. "Usually they'd meet someone, or something strange would happen in their family, and they'd think, 'Oh, what's going on inside that person's head?', and they'd start to think about how that could be represented – so I took notes. There were also some thoughts, like if we ever did a sequel, I really wanted to explore Ford's mind; why it's shattered and what would happen if you put him back together. Would that uncover some secrets about his past? Part of me was thinking, 'I'll never do that,' and then it happened!"

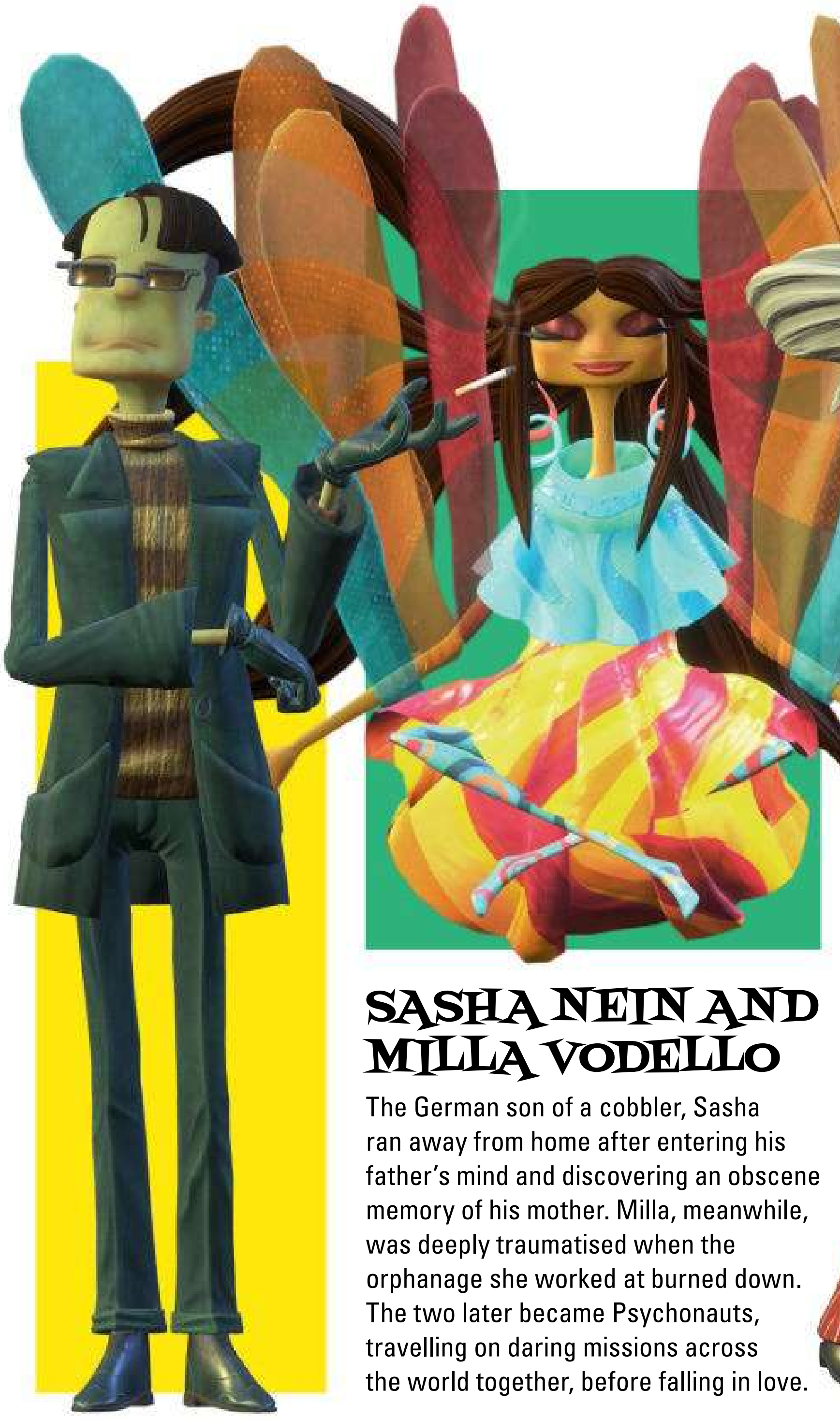
In 2015, a decade after the release of *Psychonauts*, Double Fine launched a crowdfunding campaign on Fig, hoping to raise $3.3 million for a sequel. Securing almost $1 million in a single day, the team went on to raise $500,000 more than they'd hoped, from more than 24,000 backers. However, the game was going to take time. Fortunately, Double Fine was already working on a project that was a perfect fit for the franchise; creating an opportunity to whet fans' appetites in the meantime.

Keen to create a VR game which avoided the then-typical problem of motion sickness, Tim's solution was to just fix the player in one place; an idea that fitted perfectly with *Psychonauts* – where players could just do what they needed using psychic powers. "I'm especially susceptible to that kind of nausea so I was like, 'Let's strap Raz in a chair for the whole time,'" he laughs. "But it's a very atmospheric game, it's very moody. The music is great and it sets up a lot of the story for *Psychonauts 2* in some ways."

Psychonauts In The Rhombus Of Ruin was a roaring success, giving fans a long-overdue blast from the past, using state-of-the-art tech. However, it reminded Tim that Double Fine was not so much competing against the original's true legacy, but ▶

» [PC] Richard Horvitz voices Raz in all three *Psychonauts* games.

» [PC] The original *Psychonauts* was eventually released on PC and PS2 after debuting on Xbox.



SASHA NEIN AND MILLA VODELLO

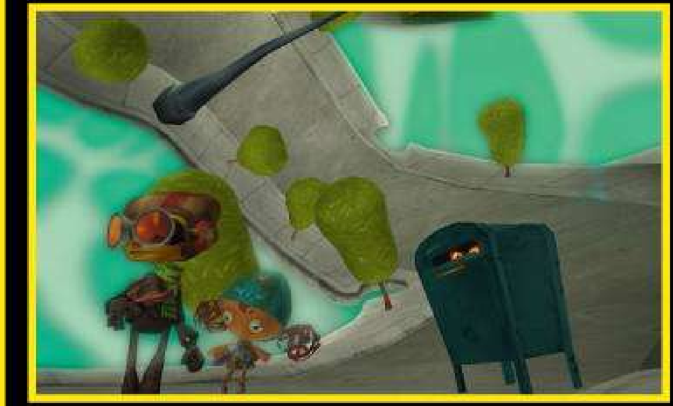
The German son of a cobbler, Sasha ran away from home after entering his father's mind and discovering an obscene memory of his mother. Milla, meanwhile, was deeply traumatised when the orphanage she worked at burned down. The two later became Psychonauts, travelling on daring missions across the world together, before falling in love.

FORD CRULLER

One of the original Psychonauts, the Psychic Six, Ford was an eminent psychic, before old age saw him reduced to the role of dispatcher. Suffering from psychoactive-induced multiple personality disorder, Ford now serves as Raz's mentor and guide. He can be summoned by simply waving a strip of bacon.

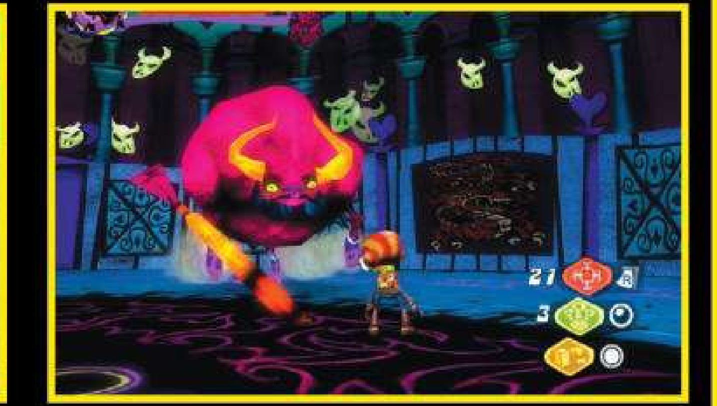
LUDICROUS LEVELS

INSIDE SOME OF GAMING'S MOST IMAGINATIVE LEVELS



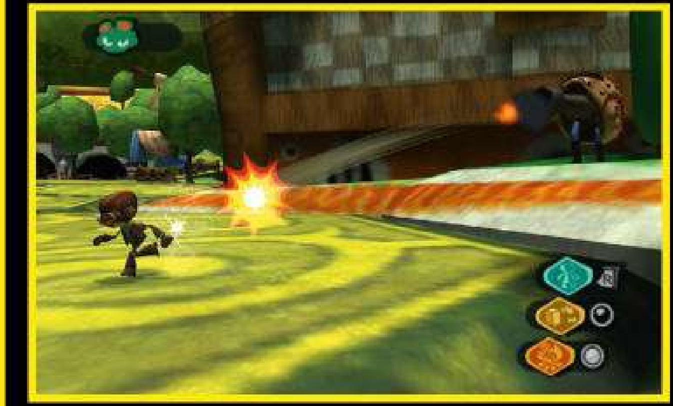
THE MILKMAN CONSPIRACY

Hailed as one of the greatest levels of all time, this takes place in the mind of a paranoid asylum security guard. Set in suburbia, it features unpredictable gravity, an inordinate number of CCTV cameras and dizzyingly winding roads, representing the guard's twisted conspiratorial logic; with eyeballs and G-Men watching suspiciously from every corner.



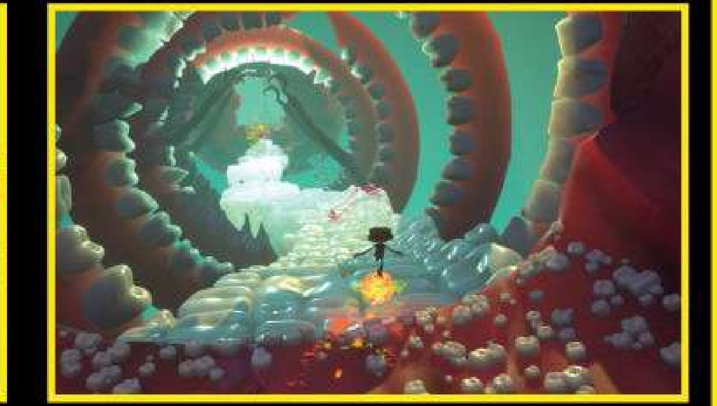
BLACK VELVETOPIA

Reminiscent of a Spanish city, Black Velvetopia is set against an incredible canvas of black velvet, overflowing with bright fluorescent colours. A massive, pink, raging bull named El Odio constantly barrages through the streets, laying waste to any who dare linger in one place for too long.



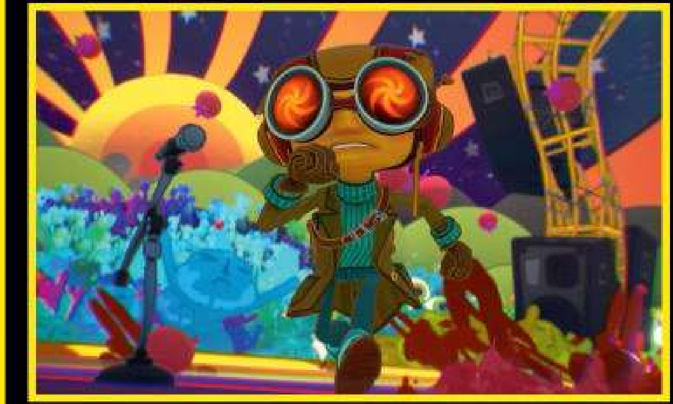
WATERLOO WORLD

Unlike Lungfishopolis, where Raz is blown up to a massive size, Waterloo World sees him shrink down to become part of a board game, which he controls with Telekinesis. Set in the mind of the straightjacket-clad Fred Bonaparte, Raz has to help the poor soul defeat his notorious ancestor, Napoleon.



LOBOTO'S LABYRINTH

If there was any doubt, journeying through the mind of a mad unlicensed dentist is somewhat of a horror show. Starting *Psychonauts 2* with a crunch, the level is a hellscape of stuffy offices, gums, teeth and water. A dentaphobe's worst nightmare.



PSI KING'S SENSORIUM

This level sees Raz enter the mind of a brain that's been trapped in a jar since the psychedelic Sixties. Deprived of all senses, its owner has lost his real-life identity and memories; and is now represented by an entity known as the Mote Of Light, voiced by Jack Black. Once Raz reconnects the mind to its senses, the world explodes into a psychedelic cacophony of colour and sound.

with people's nostalgic memories of it. "People have anti-aliasing in their memories; they improve the lighting and they only really remember their favourite parts. So, we knew that when people saw a screenshot of *Psychonauts 2*, they'd probably think, 'Oh, that's how *Psychonauts 1* looked.' But you look back at *Psychonauts 1*, and it's like wow, we had not figured out how to light faces then!"

No one had their finger on the pulse like Tim; over the years, he'd always maintained a special rapport with the *Psychonauts* fans, who made a point of coming up to him dressed as G-men every PAX. "I felt like my job was to remind the team of all of the things that the fans were going to care about." This was especially important, given that the team had swelled to almost double its size; taking on plenty of newcomers, in addition to the old guard. While *Psychonauts*' older staff helped maintain consistency, new recruits challenged them to improve, for example, the combat, and the economy of the game. However, on a few occasions, Tim had to intervene.

One example was the Clairvoyance power, which allows Raz to see through the eyes of other characters. In the original game, when Raz looked at himself through others' eyes, he would see himself depicted by an enormous range of 2D illustrative interpretations; different almost every time. When some new team members thought the 2D characters weren't necessary for the sequel, Tim intervened, "I'm telling you, I know it doesn't really seem like a load-bearing design

element, but for some people that little Clairvoyance character is their favourite thing in the game.”

> “WHEN YOU SPEND FIVE YEARS PUTTING YOUR HEART AND SOUL INTO SOMETHING, YOU’RE REALLY CLOSE TO IT”
> **Tim Schafer**

In many ways, coming up with new ideas was much harder the second time around. “It was really easy in the first game,” reflects Tim. “I’d never seen black velvet in a videogame before, so it was really fun to do a black velvet level”. He continues, “But in the second game, it was a lot harder, because indie games have become a lot more experimental, and games have gone to some really cool places in the last 20 years. So I was kind of like, ‘Let’s have this level that’s all about paper,’ and then I’d realise, ‘Oh wait, that’s basically *Tearaway*, that’s already been done,’ so we had to dig a little deeper and combine weird things like hospitals and gambling.”

Level design was always the “special challenge”, says Tim. “Are they totally original? Did they make you say ‘Wow’ and question your perceptions of reality and scale and space? And do they metaphorically represent the emotions that the characters are going through? There are all these things that levels in a ‘normal’ platformer wouldn’t have; especially not this kind of symbolic meaning to every piece of architecture in every level. Sometimes we’d get a level or design roughed out and play it and just sigh, ‘OK back to the drawing board.’”

Another challenge was fine-tuning the game’s intricate quest designs. While planning out old adventure games was fairly simple, *Psychonauts 2* was a different beast entirely. “Our lead designer, Seth Marinello, had to figure out the quest flow, and that got really complicated because we like to have these areas where it’s non-linear and you can do any level in any order – which means you might get any power in any order, which means you might need a certain power for a certain level and not be able to get through because you don’t have it. That’s what Seth had to design and redesign, and figure that out as we went along.”

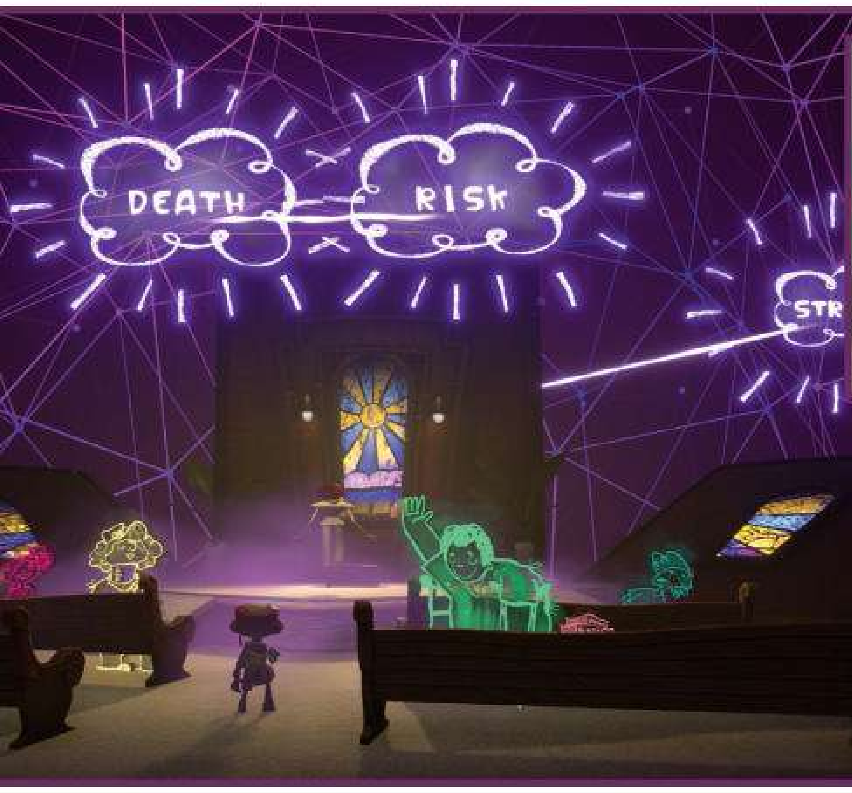
With so much fine-tuning, after millions of dollars and several years, it seemed the team had finally reached the end of its tether. Although most of the game was complete, by 2019, with no funds left, it was looking increasingly likely that some serious compromises were going to have to be made. “We had kind of hit the end of the road and were going to have to cut a lot of the game, including polish and boss fights, and it would’ve been a pretty rough landing.” Suddenly, Xbox Game Studios swooped in to save the day, acquiring Double Fine in a sweet deal that allowed the company to have its cake and eat it too; giving it the time and funding it needed to finish off the game, while retaining independence.

Although the original *Psychonauts* game was celebrated for its well-intentioned approach to mental health; Tim believes the team got a lot of that right “by accident”. “Some games are like going through a Burt Reynolds movie or something where you’re going through a warehouse, you’re shooting a bunch of things, you’re taking out pillars, you drive out the building, the building collapses and you leave this wake of destruction behind you everywhere you go. I feel like Raz always improves every mind he goes through; he sorts the baggage and he leaves the person a little healthier. That’s just what feels right for Raz and the themes of the game, but we did it on purpose the second time.”

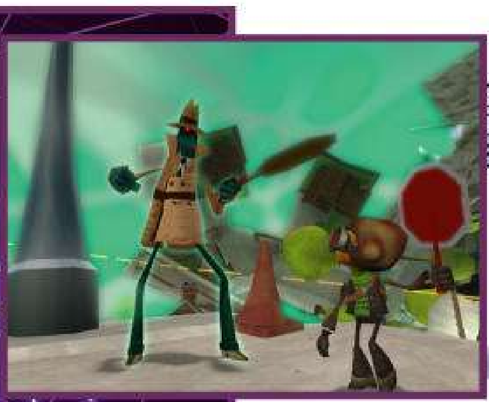
Reflecting a heightened sense of nuance, Double Fine brought in the mental health charity, Take This, to help write an advisory, and identify how to avoid stigmatising language and stereotypes. Tim adds, “I think the second game has a lot more discussion about how powerful this tool that Raz has is, and how he has to do things and be better. In the second game, he gets consent for going into peoples’ minds, which is a very subtle small change but I think a big difference between 2000 and 2020. It’s not that consent was just invented, but people talk and think about it more.” Although the team spent the last year-and-a-half working under lockdown, amazingly, the pandemic didn’t have much of an impact on efficiency. “The team did great under quarantine; different people had different struggles,” explains Tim. “People who had small kids had a struggle, people who lived alone had a different struggle and so on. The morale and mental health of the team was the biggest challenge but functionally, the team figured out ways to have the right meetings in the right spaces, how to view things together, how to play the game together and how to get together socially. They figured out great ways to achieve all of those things and we shipped this game in quarantine and I think it didn’t really miss a beat because of that, miraculously.”

After six years of development, and a 16-year wait, *Psychonauts 2* landed to universal applause; elevating the legendary original to even greater heights. Tim believes the franchise has been boosted by its inclusion on Microsoft’s Game Pass subscription service, which is perfect for games that are a little “weird”.

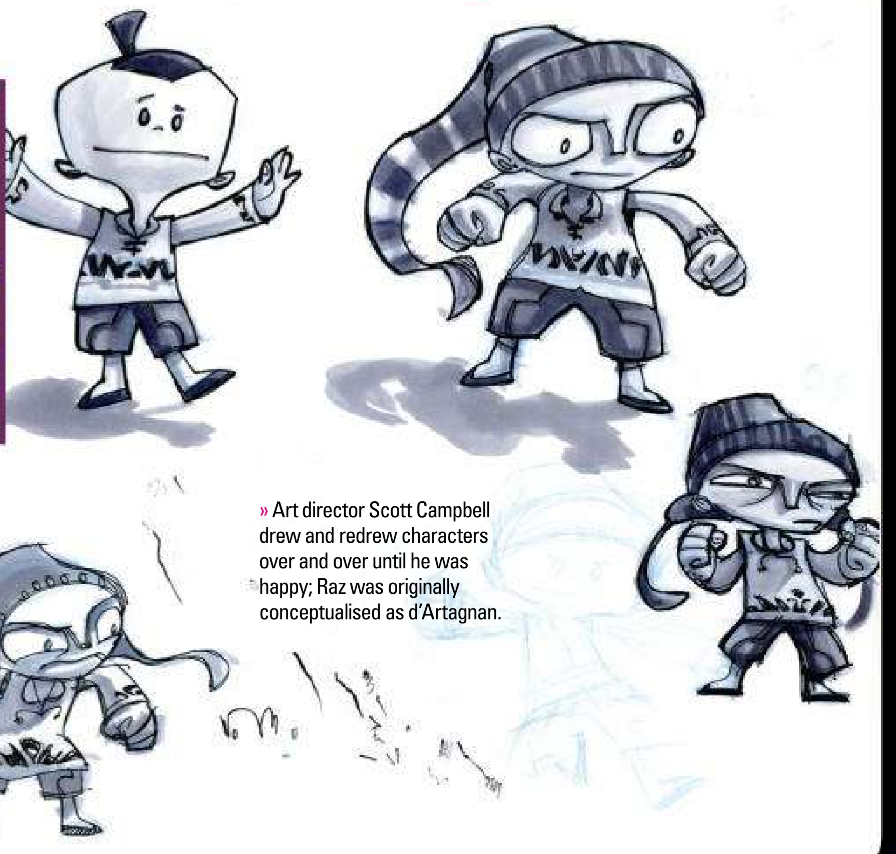
Reflecting on the game’s stellar scores, Tim muses, “It just felt like the right game at the right time”. He elaborates, “I felt that we had a special game on our hands, but you never know what’s going to happen or if anyone’s going to notice. When you spend five years putting your heart and soul into something, you’re really close to it, and you’re like, ‘‘What did we make? I can’t tell! Does it have enough?” If the reception is anything to go by, it certainly does. *



» [PC] Who said being a psychic was easy? Using the Mental Connection power, Raz has to manipulate his teacher into taking her interns to a casino.



» [PC] Raz meets all manner of interesting characters on his bizarre adventure.



» Art director Scott Campbell drew and redrew characters over and over until he was happy; Raz was originally conceptualised as d’Artagnan.

Metroid: Zero Mission

THIS IS HOW TO UPDATE A CLASSIC

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2004 » NINTENDO R&D1

One of the things that impresses me about the *Metroid* series is its consistency. Aside from *Federation Force* and *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, the series has rarely put a foot wrong and as a result of that it's one of my favourite Nintendo franchises.

While everyone is currently obsessed with *Metroid Dread*, my attention has been on Samus' earlier adventures, particularly *Zero Mission*, Nintendo R&D1's spectacular update of the bounty hunter's first adventure. Built using an enhanced version of the *Metroid Fusion* engine, Yoshio Sakamoto and the rest of his team not only enhanced Samus' first hunt from a graphical viewpoint, but also a narrative one. Admittedly, the new cutscenes aren't exactly verbose, but they still manage to flesh out Samus' character, giving you a better idea of her motivations and the gravity of the dangerous situation she finds herself in. Graphically it's superb too with the team using striking colour designs that give the adventure an almost comic-book feel at times. It's a staggering upgrade over the NES original, neatly highlighting just how far visual fidelity has been pushed since Samus first wowed Japanese gamers back in 1986.

In truth, while *Zero Mission* is a remake, it doesn't slavishly follow every twist and turn of the NES original. Map layouts can vary and there's a number of new weapons and items available that range from the Power Grip, which lets Samus cling to ledges, to the Gravity Suit which offers Samus free movement in liquids and boosts her damage resistance. The result of these subtle tweaks is that *Zero Mission* works brilliantly as an introduction to the series for newcomers, but also ensures that veterans of the NES original will feel at home while still discovering plenty of nice new surprises. The biggest surprise though is saved for the game's end, when you realise that defeating Mother Brain doesn't lead to the closing credits like it did in 1986.

Sadly, *Zero Mission* is now rapidly rising in price with complete copies selling for £200. It's available digitally, but Nintendo has it currently locked to the Wii U store. Hopefully it will come to its senses and move it to the Switch, as more gamers need to experience this fantastic game. ✱

>> This month we check out the latest Game & Watch release from Nintendo, see how the new Pokémon remasters fare and play the latest Medal Of Honor game on Oculus Quest 2

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

G-Darius HD

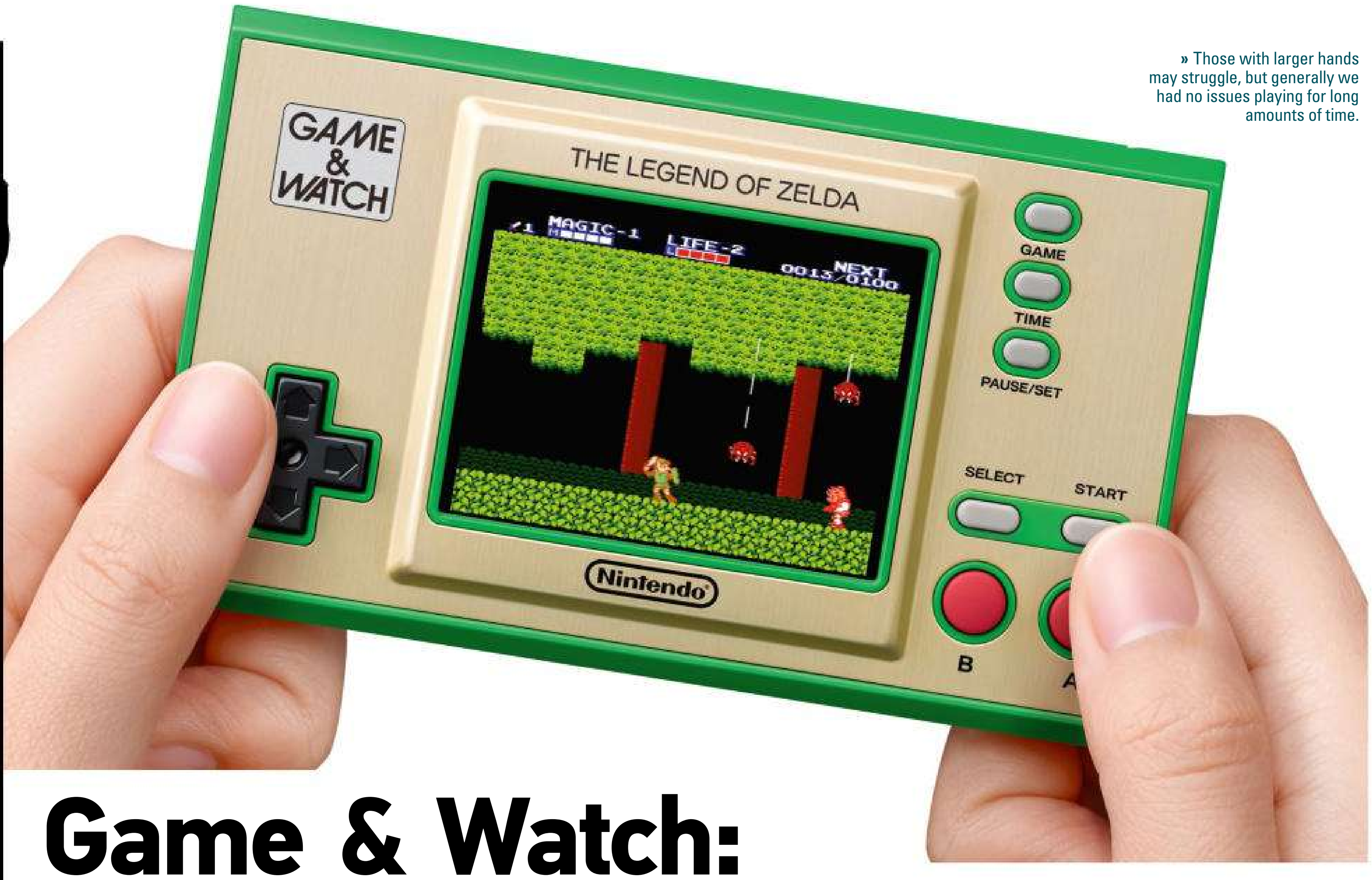
It feels a little pricey for a standalone release but this is another classic shmup that's been given a strong update by the emulation maestros at M2.

Piplup shows off with Water Gun!

NICK

Pokémon Brilliant Diamond/Shining Pearl

A lot of my friends have been enjoying this, so it's been a delight to return to Sinnoh with them. A lot has changed since I last played the DS version.



» Those with larger hands may struggle, but generally we had no issues playing for long amounts of time.

Game & Watch: The Legend Of Zelda

IS NINTENDO'S LATEST DEVICE A SOLID LINK TO THE PAST?

INFORMATION

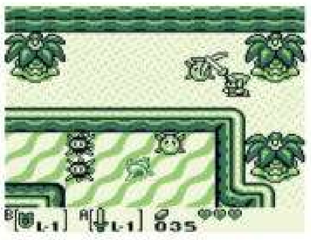
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

Nintendo's surprise revival of the Game & Watch brand was a lovely way to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the *Super Mario Bros* series, but it certainly wasn't perfect. We've now got a brand-new Game & Watch designed to celebrate *Zelda*'s 35th anniversary and it's a great improvement over last year's model.

From a presentation point of view, the design is very similar to last year's machine. The box art is once again very reminiscent of the Game & Watch titles of old and looks like it could easily be part of the games that were released in the Eighties and Nineties. As with *Super Mario Bros* there's a plastic sleeve that features neat elements from the *Zelda* series, but this time around the box serves another, more useful purpose.

One of our complaints with last year's Game & Watch was the lack of a kickstand which meant it wasn't very easy to display. Although this new model also lacks the same feature, the box's insert can at least be turned into a display stand which is quite a nice touch. Another nice feature is the Triforce symbol on the back of the Game & Watch which lights up whenever the device is turned on. It does absolutely nothing, but it's typical of the love and attention Nintendo's new device has received.

Physically, the system is almost identical to the *Super Mario Bros* build, with the key differences being a green chassis and the addition of Select and Start buttons, which sit just above the A and B buttons. The new buttons are well spaced, so unless you have gigantic thumbs you should be in no

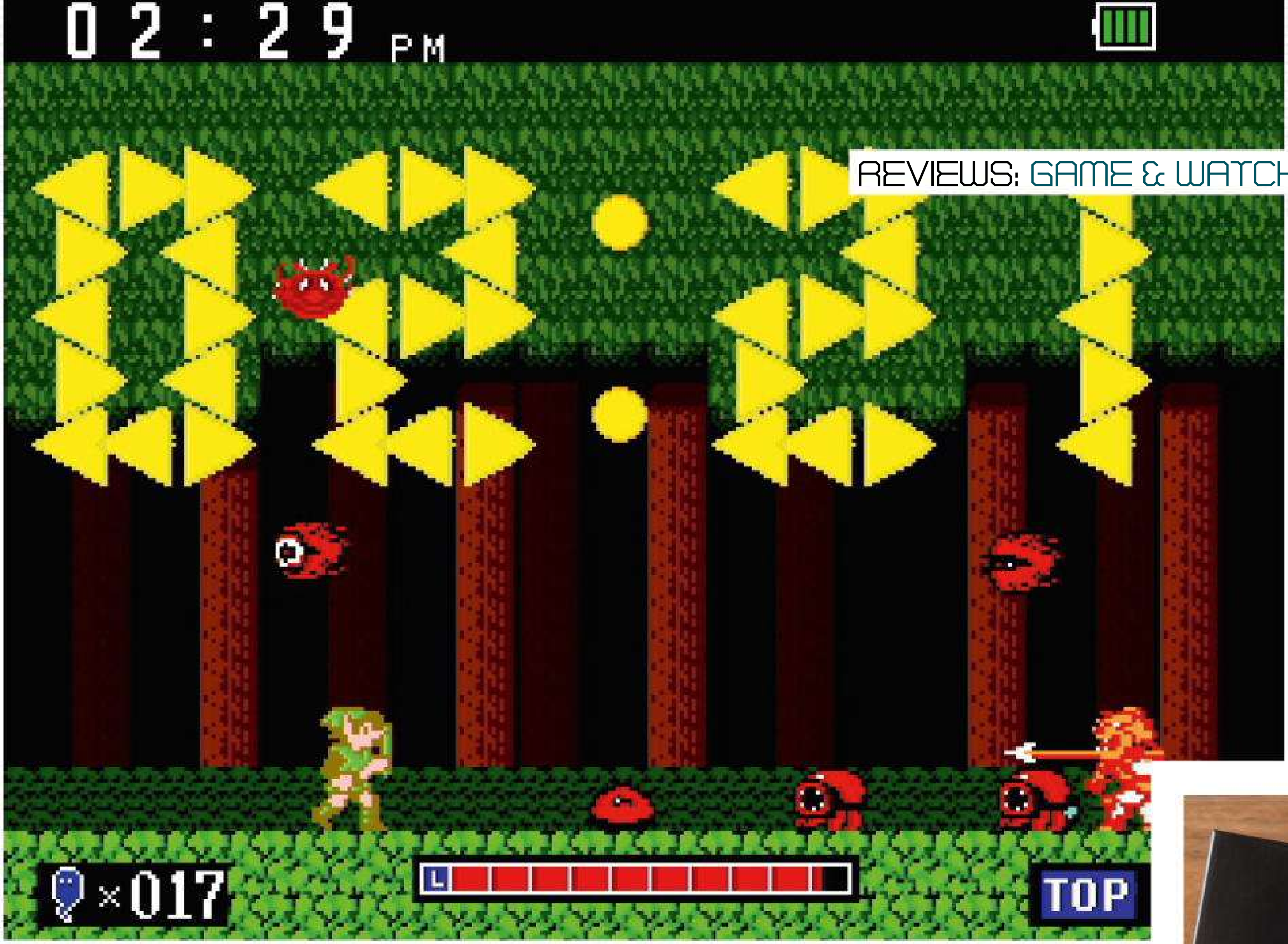


»[Game & Watch] *Link's Awakening* is still fantastic fun, but we're baffled as to why the Game Boy Color version wasn't included.

BRIEF HISTORY

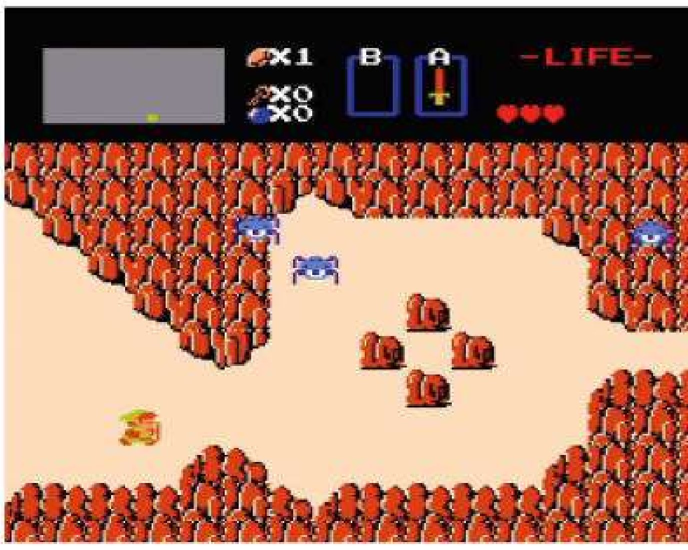
» Nintendo's Game & Watch series first appeared in 1980. The series went through numerous revisions over the years, introducing dual-screen games like *Donkey Kong*. The range was revitalised in 2020 when Nintendo created a new Game & Watch to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the *Super Mario Bros* series.

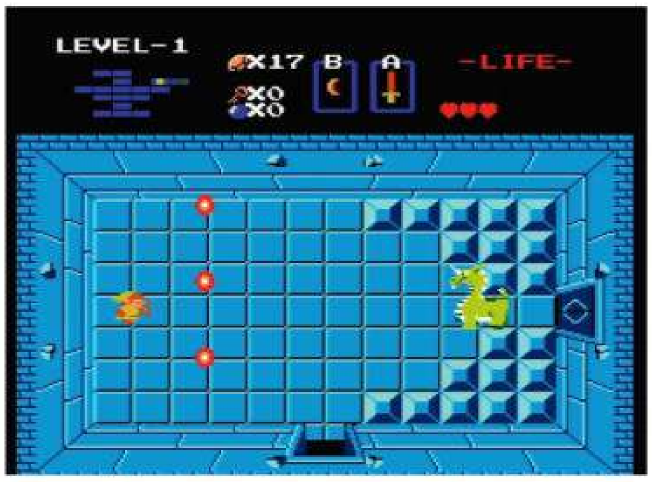
»[Game & Watch] All games automatically pause, so you can instantly resume play whenever you return.



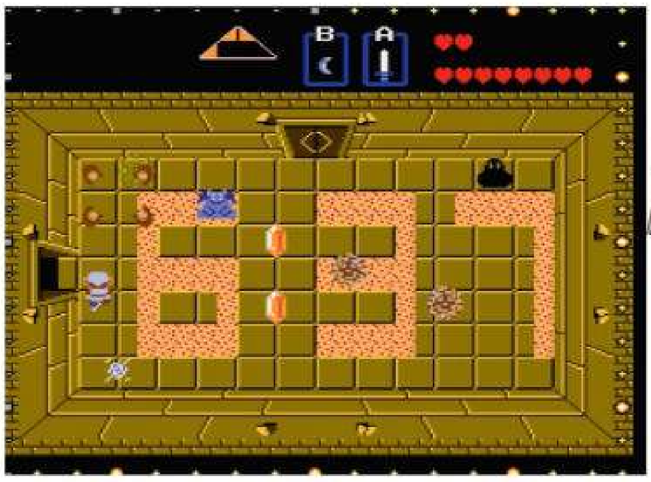
»[Game & Watch] The new Timer mode is exceptionally challenging. Good look on the ten-minute setting.

»[Game & Watch] If you've never experienced Link's first adventure, you're in for something of a treat.

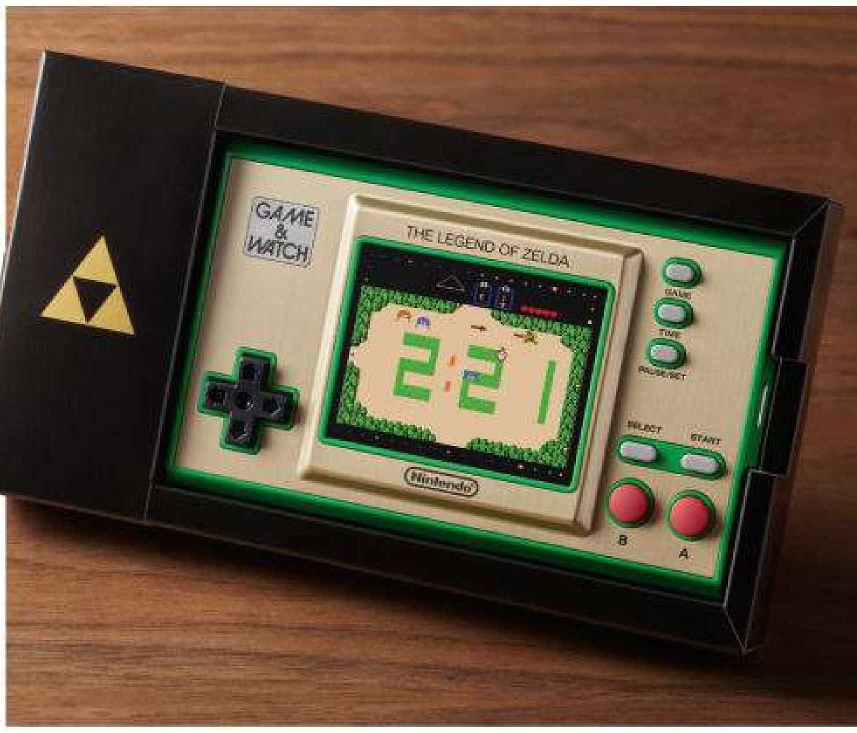




»[Game & Watch] It's not as slick as *A Link To The Past*, but Link's first adventure is still plenty of fun.



»[Game & Watch] Link will happily go through the motions here, although you can take over whenever you want.



»If you just want to show your new Game & Watch off, the new packaging allows you to do just that.

danger of accidentally pressing them during play. It otherwise features the same screen as last year's Game & Watch, meaning the display output is nice and crisp.

One gripe we had with the *Super Mario Bros* model was the lack of available games and this has been rectified here so it feels like you're getting quite a bit more for your money. The NES games *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* are both included and while the passing years have done nothing to change our opinion of Link's second NES outing, its inclusion here is still nice to see. Link's first adventure fares much better than the sequel and while it feels a little clunky today, it's easy to see how it spawned such a successful franchise. In a nice touch, Nintendo has also included the Japanese versions of both games, just in case you want to check out the numerous differences between each version.

Just like last year's Game & Watch had Mario starring in a classic Game & Watch release, this time around we have a reskinned version of *Vermin*, which features Link on mole-bashing duties. It's a pity we didn't get Link's actual Game & Watch outing from 1989, but considering that was a dual-screen model it's perhaps not surprising that it isn't included. Still, *Vermin* is a great laugh and we've sunk plenty of time into it.

The final game to be included is *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* and it remains as brilliant today as it was in 1993. Yes, it's a shame we're not getting the superior Game Boy Color version, but *Awakening* remains a fantastic 2D adventure and it's easily the highlight of the featured games. Like the NES games, there's an option to play the Japanese version and you also get other languages, including French. Because we're exceptionally greedy gamers we'd have liked to see the two *Oracle* Game Boy Color games included as well, but it's hard to get too upset with the many hours of gaming that have been crammed into Nintendo's latest device.

Even when you're done with the four core games there's still plenty to play around with thanks to Watch mode which features an interactive version of Link's first NES outing where he battles numerous enemies from the game, which is a nice little time waster in itself. Nintendo has also included a new Timer mode that is based on *Zelda II* and has you setting a time limit between one and ten minutes. Once set, you'll then have to defeat as many enemies as possible before time runs out. It's a neat little extra for Nintendo to include and there's even a selection of different backgrounds to choose from.

The emulation across all four games appears excellent and we've not noticed anything out of the ordinary while playing. Interestingly, while *Link's Awakening* features full-screen, and 1:1 aspect ratios, the other games don't include it. It looks like a filter of some sort has been applied as well because none of the games are super sharp, but that was also true of last year's model. Saving is also the same as before, so you can instantly return to wherever you left off.

While we'll always want to see additional games on devices like this, it's very hard to argue with this latest *Zelda* collection. Yes it feels like it is slightly overpriced by a tenner, but there's no denying the large amount of gaming that Nintendo's latest Game & Watch offers. ✱

In A Nutshell

It's certainly not cheap, but this is a lovely collector's item that features a selection of great, well-emulated games. *Zelda* fans are going to absolutely love it.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Pokémon: Shining Pearl

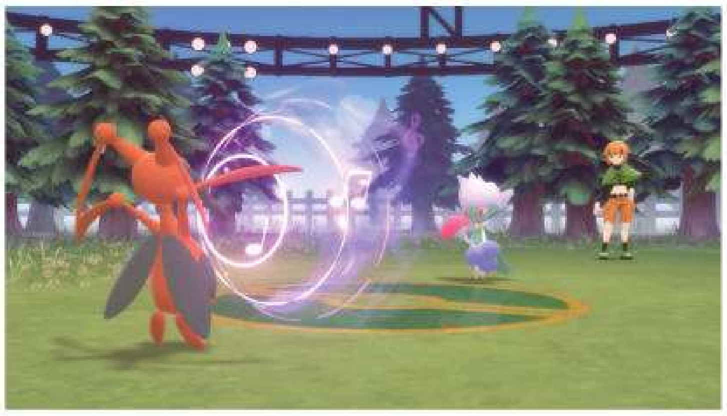
» System: Switch **» Buy it from:** Online, retail **» Buy it for:** £49.99

If you've been catching critters in the *Pokémon* world for some time, you'll have become used to a steady stream of faithful remakes of past games that bring them in line with the latest releases. This game, and its *Brilliant Diamond* counterpart, don't quite do that – while you'll find things largely as they were on the DS in 2006, you shouldn't expect the game to look or play much like the *Sword* and *Shield* games from a couple of years ago. Instead, the original layout of the game has been largely preserved and the overhead view is back, with a new, very cutesy art style replacing the awkward mixture of sprites and polygons from the originals.

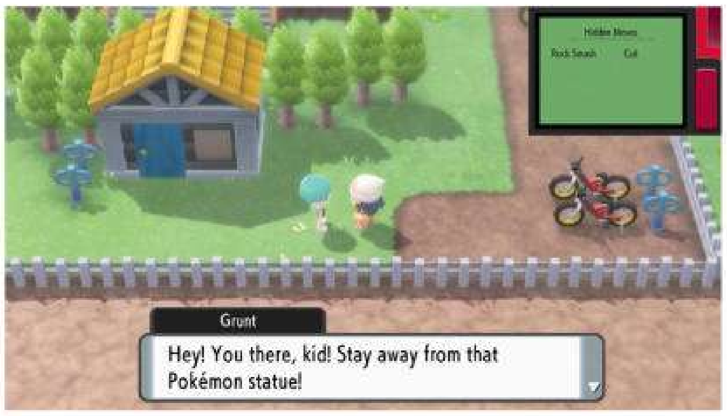
The fact that the games stick so closely to the originals is a bit of a double-edged sword. The Sinnoh region explored in this game is popular with many players, in large part due to the mythology of the area, and that hasn't changed. The experience is a little smoother this time thanks to some improvements – HM abilities can now be accessed from the Pokétch menu rather than taking up one of your Pokémon's move slots, for example. The biggest improvement comes in the form of the Grand Underground, which is a delight as Pokémon spawn on the map rather than randomly as they do in the main game, and some of them are creatures that were available in *Pokémon Platinum*.

On the other hand, many of the original flaws are preserved too. We were tired of caves full of Zubats and Geodudes 15 years ago and that hasn't changed, and it's kind of sad to return to random encounters as you walk through tall grass. The permanent EXP share reduces the need to grind battles, but your team can often feel overpowered, and fans of *Pokémon Platinum*, the third version from 2008, should know this sticks much more closely to *Diamond* and *Pearl*. These aren't deal breakers and this remake is a good way to experience a beloved adventure, but some veterans may feel that more changes would have been beneficial.

>> Score **80%**



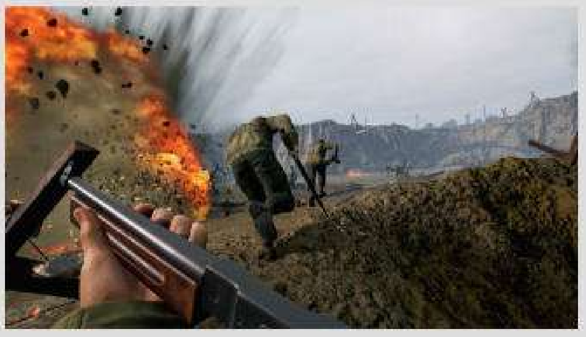
»[Switch] Battle scenes look great, with plenty of animations for the Pokémon and cool special effects.



Grunt

Hey! You there, kid! Stay away from that Pokémon statue!

»[Switch] The grid-based maps of old are back, contrasting with the more natural environments of *Sword* and *Shield*.



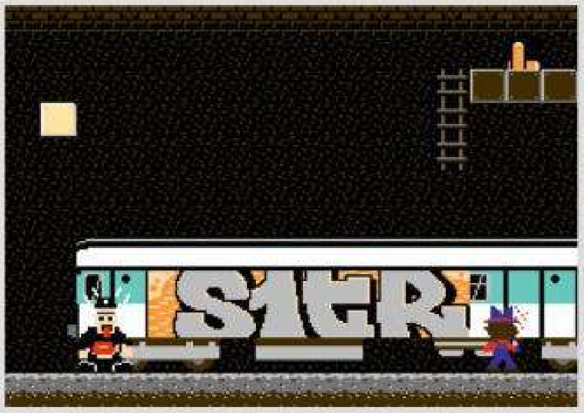
Medal Of Honor: Above And Beyond

» System: Oculus Quest 2
» Buy it from: Online **» Buy it for:** £29.99

Originally released on Oculus Rift, Respawn Entertainment's reboot of *Medal Of Honor* has moved to Oculus Quest 2 and it's a rather ambitious port. While it's taken an obvious graphical hit, *Above And Beyond* is still impressive and retains all the spectacular set pieces that made the Rift version so fun. The single-player campaign is admittedly rather simplistic and punctuated by annoying cutscenes (which are now skippable) but there's still lots of fun to be had as you ski down mountains, commandeer tanks and storm an embassy. Far more enjoyable is the frantic multiplayer mode which highlights Respawn's mastery within the genre, while a Survival mode also offers longevity outside of the main campaign.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **70%**



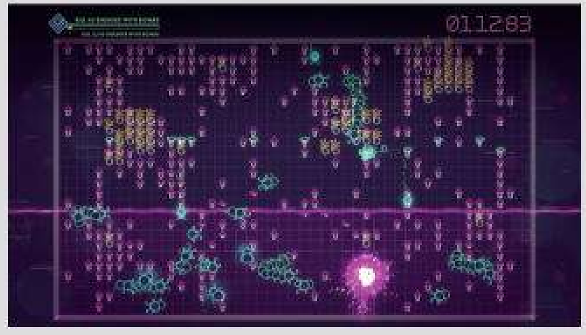
Zdey The Game

» System: NES
» Buy it from: artcade.fr **» Buy it for:** €50.00

This French platformer is the result of a collaboration between street artist Tim Zdey and the Artcade team. As Zdey, your goal is to make it through the late-night streets of Paris and the Metro, in order to paint a train with art from one of many guest artists. Of course, there are all manner of obstacles in your way, but you can collect items to deal with them – if you see an elderly lady, why not chuck a cat at her? The initial stages are quite simple in terms of both visuals and level design, but the difficulty and visual detail both take a step up once you're past the train, and the music is enjoyable throughout. It's not the longest or most-polished platformer, but the humour goes a long way.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **74%**



Centipede: Recharged

» System: Switch (tested), PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £7.99

We really enjoyed *Missile Command: Recharged*, so we're pleased to report that this new spin on *Centipede* is equally enjoyable. While it's graphically simplistic, the style used works well as it allows you to focus on blasting – of which there is plenty. It's the same old *Centipede*, but now you've got a great range of power-ups to battle your enemies with, including rapid-fire guns, ghosts that scare all creepy-crawlies away and a mirror that runs along the top of the screen and copies your fire. Online leaderboards exist, but there's an additional Challenge mode which features all sorts of tasks that range from shooting a specific number of scorpions to achieving certain scores or avoiding shooting poisonous mushrooms. The end result is an entertaining spin on a classic.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **75%**

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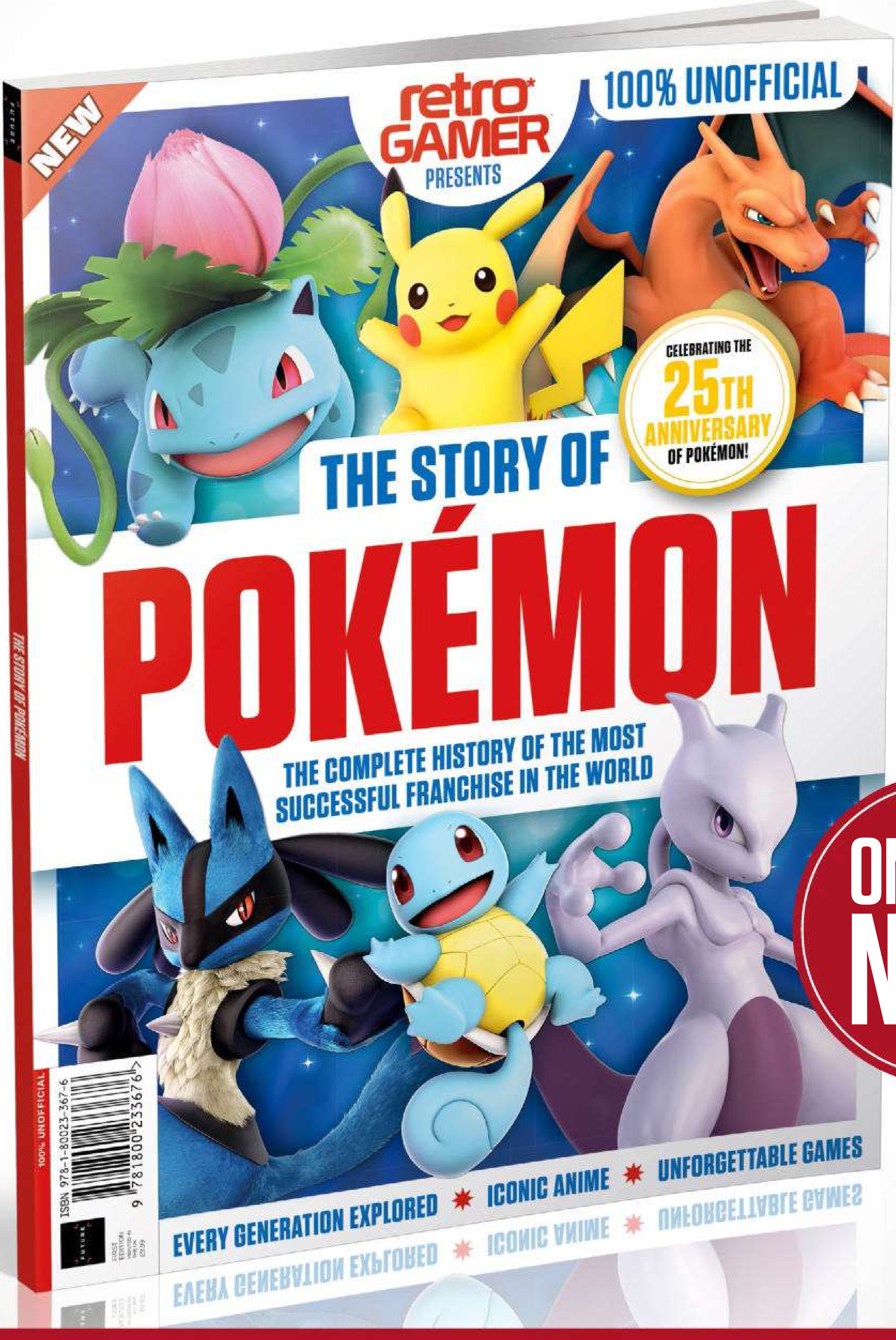
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HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

ABANDONED ADVENTURES

We talk about the games we never ended up completing

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Very few people can claim to have beaten every game they've played, and we're certainly not among them. But we're not interested in proving the purity of our gaming records – we're more interested in how and why those games were abandoned before the credits rolled, and whether or not that has changed over time. So we got together for a nice chat about the whole issue, and here are the results.

NICK
We all must have started a game and abandoned it before the end. Which ones stand out to you guys?

DARRAN
Immediately off the top of my head it's *Halo 3: ODST*. I really liked the approach and the setting and how it played off against the main story of *Halo 3* but I simply never went back to it and I'm not sure why.

NICK
For me, *Mirror's Edge* was a big one. I got about halfway through and was enjoying it, but I got fed up with battling through motion sickness.

TIM
These days I try to complete everything that I'm into, but there are so many 16-bit games that fell by the wayside (and a load of ones on Game Pass). The one I really wish I'd finished was *The Story Of Thor* on the Mega Drive – but I'd only hired it out from the video shop for one day and it's a bit too long for that.

» [Mega Drive] Hopefully *Sega Mega Drive Classics* will reach Games Pass so Tim gets another go at *The Story Of Thor*.

DARRAN
You could at least save on *The Story Of Thor*, though. This reminds me of *Jurassic Park* on the SNES. I really enjoyed it but I never went back to it because it has no save option so I've never had the time to play it as I knew it would take too long to complete.

NICK
Speaking of saves, I abandoned *Final Fantasy VIII* after getting about 50 hours in. I'd lent it to someone who never returned it, and when I finally bought another copy I just had no idea what I was supposed to do.

DARRAN
I find that with RPGs in general. They all need to have a recap option that highlights everything you've done in a bullet point format. So what makes everyone bounce off a game in the first place?

TIM
The 15-minute bullshit test.

DARRAN
Tell me more, Tim.

TIM
Back when I was reviewing games regularly there were so many games coming in that after a while you could tell if something was worth playing after 15 minutes. All those awful platformers etc, still had to play them more for the reviews, but damn it was often painful.

DARRAN
The downside is that even if you know a game is rubbish you still have to play it!

» [Xbox One] Spending a good chunk of money was a motivating factor for Tim to stick with *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.

NICK
Even if I'm enjoying a game, I can bounce off it just because of life commitments or other games arriving. Streaming has actually given me discipline there, because the viewers want to follow the story.

DARRAN
Choice is a point for me as well. I've got over 200 Switch games now, so if something doesn't grab me in the first hour I'll simply move to another game. The mistake I make however is that I don't sell on the game I've stopped playing.

TIM
An hour? You need to get that down to 15 minutes. Saves a lot of time.

NICK
Does a subscription service like Games Pass make it easier to abandon games?

TIM
Very much so, Nick. It's like, "Wow, five new games on Game Pass!" Then I download them, play them for a while and delete them. It's kind of upsetting sometimes when you see something you're interested in and it turns out to be a bit rubbish.

> "I justified buying it because it was my birthday, but it still felt very wrong"
> **TIM EMPEY**

DARRAN
That reminds me of Netflix. People say things to me like, "It gets really good after six episodes." Why would I want to waste that much time when so many other shows are available?

NICK
I suppose in that situation, at least you were going to subscribe regardless of the game. I'd take that over spending the full amount of cash on a dud game.

DARRAN
Money is often a reason why I give up on something. If I didn't pay a lot for it in the first place I feel less inclined to complete it.

TIM
I recently spent £60 on *Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy*. I justified buying it because it was my birthday, but it still felt very wrong. However, you can bet I finished that and I'll play it again for the different dialogue choices just to

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get my money's worth out of it. I did really enjoy it though.

DARRAN
My daughter just bought that for me in the Black Friday sale for £35!

TIM
God damn it.

DARRAN
Sorry, Tim. I have heard very good things about it though. You can at least sell it on.

TIM
I can't! I bought it digitally!

DARRAN
And that's why I'm physical for life.

NICK
It's interesting that none of us have mentioned difficulty yet. I've still not finished *Bangai-O*, I got to the last level and just couldn't beat it. I'll do it one day, honest.

DARRAN
Ooh, ooh. I've literally stopped playing *Sega Superstar Tennis* for that very reason. I was loving Superstar Mode and all the references to classic Sega games but I can't beat Alex Kidd and Reala and it's really annoyed me as I can't say I've finished a game until I see the developer credits.

TIM
God Hand on hard difficulty – I conquered that. But I bounced off *Hollow Knight* after the first boss. Some difficulties are good, some are exercises in frustration.

DARRAN
I got really far into *Hollow Knight* but I too have hit a stupidly hard boss and can't find the willpower to finish it.

NICK
What would encourage you to go back and try again?

DARRAN
Probably being 20 years younger and having the reflexes I had as a 20-year-old. What about you, Tim?

TIM
Put Gene from *God Hand* in it. But, nah, I really don't think I could go back to it, maybe I've just had enough of Metroidvanias for now.

DARRAN
I get a lot more distracted now compared to when I was a kid. Maybe I just have too many games and I'm spoiled for choice?

NICK
Probably, but I'm the same – you can see my shelves.

TIM
And you should see my amazing digital library. It's in the cloud! Or something. ✱

Zell 230
Squall 313
Selphie 378

» [PlayStation] In exchange for *Final Fantasy VIII*, Nick borrowed an ex-rental copy of *Tobal No 1* – a square deal, surely?

» [Switch] Both Darran and Tim struggled with *Hollow Knight*. If Drew was here, he'd put us right.

» [Xbox 360] *Mirror's Edge* will probably be too much for Nick to ever go back to, which is a real shame.

» [Xbox 360] Darran's been on a 360 kick lately, so we expect he'll return to *Halo 3: ODST* eventually.

READERS REACT

What games did you never play to completion?

Andrew Walker
I abandoned *Project Zero* on the original Xbox part way through. That's because one of the puzzles glitched and no matter how many times you did it right, it wouldn't progress the game. I still don't know how the game ends.

Ben Jay-Minn
The Last of Us. I've tried several times to get into it, but the characters are so unlikable and the gameplay so generic that after the brilliant intro the rest of the game just isn't interesting enough to finish. [A pity, I think it's incredible - Ed]

Sloanysoft
Stubbs The Zombie. I was having great fun with it until you got to the bit where it turned into a third-person shooter, then it got fiddly and annoying. Not sure if I'll go back, just so many games to play and I've got to the age where I no longer want to waste time on ones that bug me.

Dave Tucker
I abandoned *The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* fairly quickly when I couldn't work out how to blow out the candles. It was months later I worked out my DS microphone didn't work. I will not be returning to it as it's not very good.

The Lost Retro Tapes
Anything with forced stealth in a non-stealth game. *Bully*, *Call Of Duty* (the latest one), the newish *Tomb Raider* all spring to mind. I did come back to *Spider-Man* and the Mary Jane sections and was glad I did, although I wish I could've skipped them.

Pete Adamson
So much stuff due to getting hopelessly stuck, but a famous one is *Kingdom Hearts II*. I got stuck on Demyx for ages. I still go back and try it but he always beats me!

Tama Hero
I love *Moon Remix RPG* but I'm a completionist. There's one guy you can only get by winning the fishing contest. I set myself up to grind to get him but found it so tedious I never finished. But I couldn't bring myself to decide to move on without him. So I just never played again.

Nathan Fisher
On my original Xbox I abandoned *Ninja Gaiden*. I reached a point where it was so punishingly difficult for me that I rage quit and didn't come back for six months. And of course I got past the bit I was stuck on almost immediately and finished the game that very weekend. Just typical.

EREIAMJH
I put down *Silent Hill 2* at a save point in the spooky hospital. I never booted the game up again, because the idea of being in that hospital again genuinely terrified me.

Derek Holmes
PC gun exploitation game, *Soldier Of Fortune* back in the big box days gave me terrible motion sickness and I had to abandon it a couple of levels in, which was a shame as I was enjoying its over-the-top gun physics.

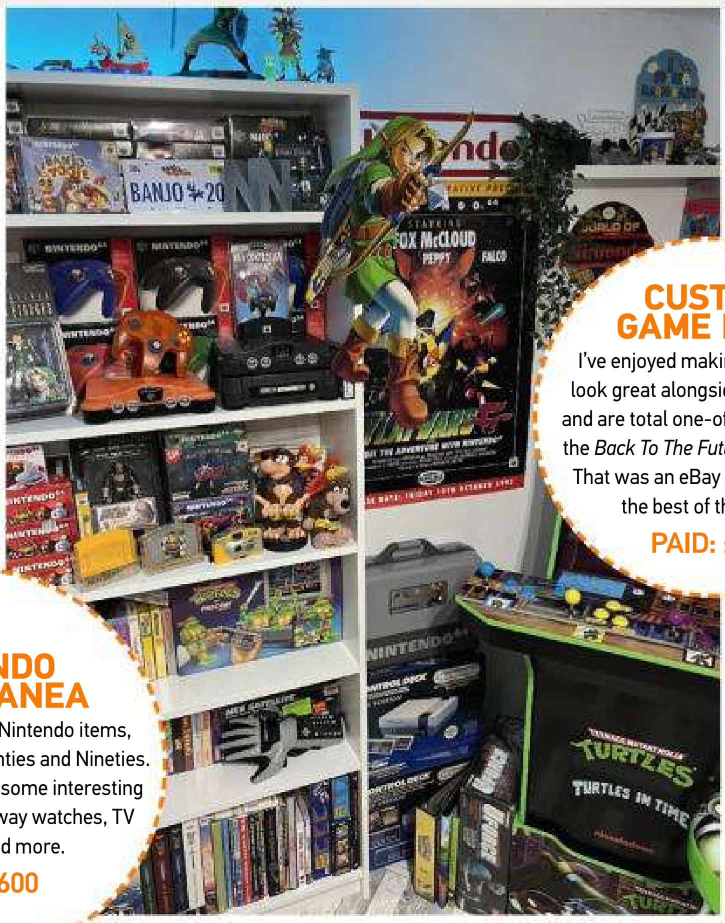
COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

NINTENDO MISCELLANEA

I enjoy finding obscure Nintendo items, particularly from the Eighties and Nineties. I've managed to acquire some interesting pieces, including mailaway watches, TV show prizes and more.

PAID: £600



CUSTOM GAME BOYS

I've enjoyed making these. They look great alongside the originals and are total one-offs. I didn't make the *Back To The Future* one, though. That was an eBay pick up, but it's the best of the bunch!

PAID: £200

BIO

NAME:
Peter Chrichard

LOCATION:
Durham, United Kingdom

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
N64

COLLECTION WORTH:
£25-30,000

TWITTER:
@pchrichard

THE GAMES MASTER

Peter Chrichard tells us why he's a big fan of Nintendo

If you're a fan of Nintendo games you're probably already gazing at Peter Chrichard's collection with small pangs of jealousy. Amazingly, despite the depth and size of his collection, Peter started quite late in his Nintendo quest, starting in 2006 and seriously collecting in 2015.

It's a pretty impressive haul for a recent collector, so we were keen to know what it is about Nintendo games that attracts Peter to them. "Nintendo carries the most nostalgia for me," he admits to us. "I love their first-party titles and they have an interesting and important history in games."

Peter's focus on Nintendo games has meant that they need their own dedicated space and he's been lucky enough to recently convert his garage into a room to house it all. "The collection is an accumulation of things I've bought over the last 15 years, but it's only in the last year I've had an opportunity to showcase everything," he explains. "It took nearly three weeks to build walls, decorate, and fill it all. Next up, I'd really like to extend my boxed NES collection." Although he's proud of how his collection currently looks, it's something that he's created largely for himself, although he does occasionally get visitors… "I have a really supportive wife who understands the hobby and pays an interest," he tells us. "I also have five children, but beyond wanting to show their friends the room they really aren't that interested beyond an occasional go on the arcade machine!"

NINTENDO COLOR TV GAME RANGE

I have the full boxed Color TV Game range from the Seventies. These were the first videogame systems released by Nintendo.

PAID: £800

While Peter enjoys numerous Nintendo systems he has a particular fondness for Nintendo 64 games and has amassed quite the selection. "The Nintendo 64 has some of the very best games ever created, including *Super Mario 64*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, *Mario Party*, *Donkey Kong* and the WCW wrestling range, all of which stand the test of time and play well today," he explains. "Again, for me personally, there's a lot of nostalgia and fondness attached to the console, and I've enjoyed collecting the numerous console variants and games."

In addition to amassing his N64 collection, Peter has also been quite clever in how he sources his games and tends to look online and overseas. "I primarily use eBay nowadays, as the collection is fairly full and I'm quite selective about what's added to it," he admits. "I also use international proxy services such as Buyee and Sendico for Yahoo auctions and Mercari."

Unsurprisingly, Peter feels import gaming is a crucial aspect of collecting. "To get the full experience of a particular console, you really have to look outside what was available in your own region – both in terms of games and accessories," he explains. "Japan for one released LOADS of weird and wonderful accessories that the rest of the world never knew they needed, such as the Pocket Sonar for fishing. There's something cool about seeing something you're familiar with, such as a Game Boy, in an unfamiliar way, or even discovering a hidden gem of a game you didn't have the opportunity to play the first time around."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

NINTENDO PLAYING CARDS

I've got a range of vintage Nintendo Company playing cards, including an extremely rare pre-war Hanafuda set. They're all beautifully made, something anyone can appreciate, and an important part of Nintendo history.

PAID: £300

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NINTENDO 64DD

■ I wanted this for nearly 20 years after reading about it as a teenager and consistently referred to it as my Holy Grail item; I never thought I'd own one, but managed to pick one up on a Japanese classified ad about a year ago.

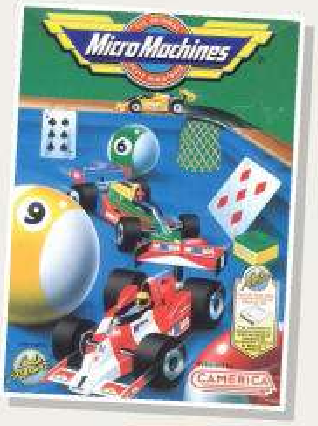
PAID: £550

Interestingly, while many complain about the rising prices of retro games Peter feels that it's still possible to amass a decent collection without spending a fortune. "Prices have steadily increased, but there are always bargains to be had and options to play even the most expensive games," he explains. "Sealed and graded games on the other hand are a bubble that must burst eventually."

So what advice would Peter offer to anyone starting their own collection? "It's a minefield, so don't start spending big money before understanding what you're buying," he concludes. "Understand that almost always, there will be other opportunities to get what you want for your collection, and don't let go of sealed or rare one-off pieces without careful thought; that's been my only regret over the years." ✱

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

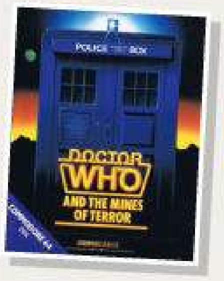


MICRO MACHINES

There are numerous versions of Codemaster's top-down racer and they range in price. The NES edition can reach prices of **£40** complete, while the Amiga version rarely rises beyond **£15.** The Mega Drive edition shouldn't cost more than **£10,** but the Master System and Game Gear versions can both hit **£80** complete. If you're after complete SNES and Game Boy variants, they shouldn't cost more than **£30.**

STREETS OF RAGE 3

The third part of Sega's popular series continues to rise in price. You'll be paying up to **£140** for a complete PAL copy, while a US edition sells for around **£170.** The Japanese edition (*Bare Knuckle III*) is the priciest and can reach **£220.** Carts are obviously cheaper, but not by much.

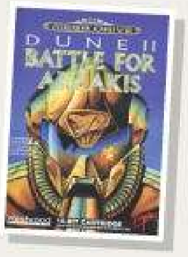


DOCTOR WHO AND THE MINES OF TERROR

This *Doctor Who* adventure may terrify your wallet. All three versions seem to start at **£30** and we've seen mint versions of the BBC Micro hit as much as **£99.** Yikes!

DEAD OR ALIVE

Tecmo's arcade game only received a Japanese release on Sega's Saturn, so make sure your system can play it. If you can run it then you're looking at paying between **£10** and **£35** for a complete copy.



DUNE II: BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS

Dune's recent film release may be responsible for current high prices. Mint Amiga versions can reach **£100,** but the *Hit Squad* edition is cheaper at **£30.** Although the CD-ROM PC edition typically costs **£20,** the disk edition hits highs of **£160!** It's even costly on Mega Drive with copies selling between **£65** and **£150.**

RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION

Sony's slick racer is cheap no matter what region you purchase it for. Basically, if you're paying more than **£10** you're paying too much.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS

Hack-and-slash fans won't have to shell out much for this slick videogame adaptation. The PS2 and Xbox versions sell between **£3** and **£10.** The GameCube edition is **£8** to **£12,** while complete GBA copies sell for no more than **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

RESIDENT EVIL 2 TO 4

While we're often dubious of graded games, factory-sealed releases are beginning to rise in value (but not to the same silly heights, thankfully). A collection featuring the GameCube editions of *Resident Evil 2, 3* and *4* recently went crazy, with 58 bids from 9 bidders pushing the final price to **£529.** Wowsers!

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

FIGHT FIEND

How Nick's upbringing turned him into a fighting game fanatic

When I think about the great influences on my life, I have memories before the times that I encountered many of them. As a young child in hospital, there was no Sonic cuddly toy to hold because Sonic didn't exist yet, and the 1997 general election was the first time I took any real notice of politics. But thanks to my dad, karate was in my life from day one. He'd been training since before I was born and he eventually became an instructor and later a club owner, so naturally that became a family thing. Two of my sisters have earned their black belts, and while I never reached that level myself I had some minor success at competitions in the mid-Nineties, winning a couple of third place trophies for kata. Even though I no longer train today, I could probably perform a reasonable Heian Shodan.

Karate planted the seeds for so many of my interests. I'll happily watch any combat sports, from UFC and boxing to Olympic judo and even the simulated scrapping of pro wrestling. My competitive streak was definitely fostered through competition days, and my interest in Japanese culture started here too. It also influenced our entertainment diet – *The Karate Kid* was appointment viewing whenever it was on TV, and I definitely saw *Kickboxer* too young. Since my dad was and is a gamer himself, you can probably imagine where this is heading. *Mortal Kombat* was the first fighting series I really got into, as dad borrowed the original game before eventually getting *Mortal Kombat II* for the Mega Drive, and we'd play against each other regularly. At home, I'd borrow the Master System version of the original from friends, though I wasn't allowed to use the blood code there since it scared my sister.

In the late-Nineties, my tastes broadened a lot. Whenever we'd go to the town centre, my mum would give me a 50p piece or two so I could play in Sega Park while she got things done. It was there that I conquered *Virtua Fighter 3tb* with a team of Lion, Jacky and Kage, and there that reading *CVG* paid off when I got to delight in the thrills of playing as Akuma in *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*. It was also there that I got my first challenge from a stranger in an arcade, and I narrowly lost that match. I grabbed *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition* when the local video rental shop started clearing out Mega Drive games. I discovered *Tekken 2* on a demo disc at a friend's house, and the game came with the PlayStation I got for my 12th birthday.

Fighting games are best played with other people of course, and I've been fortunate to enjoy them with a number of friends. My friend James and I discovered games like *Guilty Gear* and *Street Fighter III* together, and I now have both the Saturn and the copy of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* we played the first time I visited his house. At university, I'd play *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* on the PSP with one of my flatmates in the first year, and in my final year the *Dead Or Alive* games became house favourites because of their accessible counterattacks and spectacular multi-tiered arenas. *BlazBlue* became an unexpected hit in another shared house when my housemate's girlfriend mastered Taokaka. I've had plenty of fun fighting my colleagues too, whether I was getting my face kicked off by Ryan King and Luke Albigés or experiencing the *Third Strike* strategy known only as the Darran Jones Factor.

I'd never thought to count how many fighting games I owned before, but once I resolved to write about how much I enjoy fighting games, I decided to do it. It turns out I've got over 100 – and that's just counting standard fighting games. I didn't include anything in a compilation, nor anything sports-based like boxing or wrestling games, or unusual ones like *Power Stone* or *Psychic Force*. In fact, I keep finding ones that aren't in my collection spreadsheet, and I've just realised that the most expensive game I ever bought was a fighting game – a Neo Geo MVS copy of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*. Do I need to own *Virtua Fighter* on 32X, Saturn and PC? No, but the differences between the versions fascinate me anyway. Do I really need *Street Fighter III: Double Impact* when *Third Strike* is right there? Sure, because it's fun to play the versions where Sean was taken more seriously.

I guess that's the thing that shows how much you love a genre, really. I love the little details that set each game and each series apart, whether it's the crazy movement options you find in anime fighters, the transformative nature of the sidestep in 3D fighting games, or even something as simple as going back to a time before super moves. I love seeing how some characters drastically evolve over the years, while some barely need to be changed to remain relevant. And of course what I love the most is putting this all into practice, whether I'm casually beating up the CPU on a random game or playing winner stays on with friends. If I walk past you and see you're playing a fighting game, I'll almost certainly stop to ask what it is and very likely ask to play a round or two with you. So if you ever see me at an event or somewhere like Arcade Club, you know what to do – issue a challenge! I might win, I might not, but either way you know I'll be having fun. ✱

BEST BRAWLERS

THE CHARACTERS I PICK AS MY MAINS IN VARIOUS GAMES

RYU

A lot of the time, I'm guilty of picking anyone who looks like my image of a martial artist – white gi, no shoes, probably a main character of some kind.

ZATO-1

Guilty Gear is where I find myself straying from the norm the most, with Zato's shadow buddy Eddie providing a very different gameplay style.

JACKY BRYANT

I strung together a streak of 19 wins in online ranked play with this scumbag in *Virtua Fighter 5 Ultimate Showdown* earlier in the year.

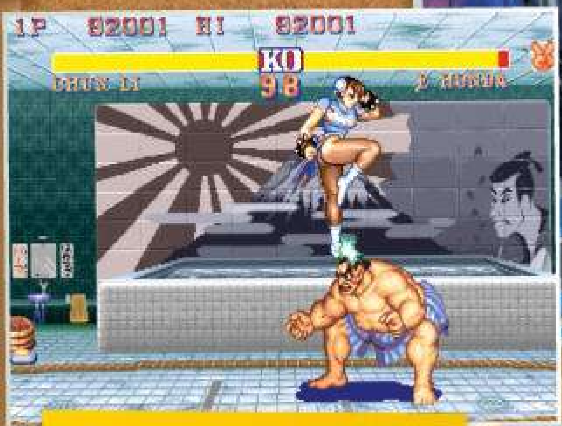
SUB-ZERO

I was a Liu Kang player when I was young, but there's something about ol' frosty-chops that has made me switch my main as an adult.

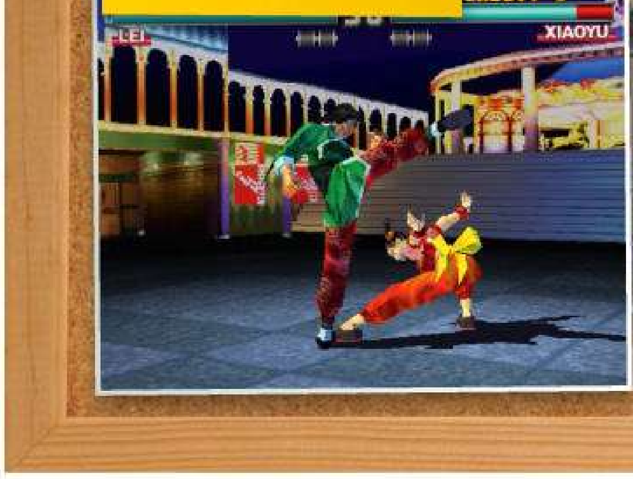
YOSHIMITSU

I'm going to be honest, I chose him because I knew him from *Tekken* and didn't want to have to learn a new character for *Soulcalibur*.

THAT'S A PORTION OF MY COLLECTION, WITH SOME REAL FIGHTING LOVE – I'LL PLAY ANYTHING FROM THE OBVIOUS TO THE OBSCURE.



[ARCADE] AS A KID, I TOOK ANY CHANCE I COULD TO PLAY THE STREET FIGHTER II CABINET AT THE LOCAL FOOTBALL CLUB.



[PLAYSTATION] I NEVER HAD TEKKEN 3 AS A KID, BUT I'D PLAY THE DEMO DISC ENDLESSLY.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE FIGHTING GAMES

Readers share their best bruising brawlers with us

Connor
Fist Of The North Star is a totally broken, hilarious PS2 game that is filled with gravity-breaking infinite combos that don't stop until time out. Fun fact, it's dubbed 'kusoge' (or shitty game) which is a lighthearted handle for busted games that are still fun to play.

Dave Tucker
Soulcalibur II (GameCube version obviously) saw my housemates and me through uni. Brilliant characters and fantastic fight mechanics. Come with me to Hell!

Retro Gaming Geek
It may not have had the nuance of *Street Fighter*, but to ten-year-old me, *Turtles Tournament Fighters* was so much fun. All the art, characters, moves and levels all wrapped up in one nice *TMNT* package.

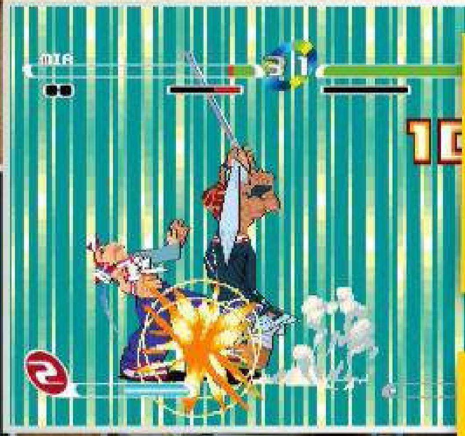
Steven Noad
I'm not always keen on fighting games but had a soft spot for *Mortal Kombat*. Who wouldn't love being able to pull off a fatality move? It felt great when I was able to do it.

_daemons
Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting. The classic gameplay tweaked and sped up, and no super moves that IMHO changed the games for the worse. Loads of memories playing this shoulder to shoulder with strangers in arcades, many of whom would become good friends as a result.

Chris Bartliff
I like the slower, more measured pace of the *Samurai Shodown* games. A Neo Geo console was a distant dream back in the day, so I'm enjoying catching up with the series on the Nintendo Switch.

INSERT COIN
TERRY BOGARD
27
HOTARU FUTABA
CREDIT 00

[NEO GEO] GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES COST ME A LOT OF MONEY, BUT I THINK IT WAS WELL WORTH IT.



[PLAYSTATION] I FOUND SLAP HAPPY RHYTHM BUSTERS BY BROWSING THE JAPANESE PLAYSTATION STORE AND ENDED UP LOVING IT.

MASTER HUANG
CREDIT: 0

[ARCADE] QUITE A FEW COLLEAGUES WERE INTRIGUED BY HIDDEN GEM MARTIAL MASTERS WHEN THEY SAW ME PLAYING IT IN THE OFFICE.

43
El Blaze
TOURNAMENT
TIME
3rd STAGE

[PS4] WHEN I PLAY VIRTUA FIGHTER WITH FRIENDS, I AM A GENTLEMAN AND CHOOSE SARAH OVER JACKY.

SUB-ZERO
JOHNNY CAGE

[PS3] WAS I TOO YOUNG FOR MORTAL KOMBAT? MAYBE, BUT IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THIS IN THE NINETIES.

15"68
RAVE
44.30

[PLAYSTATION] I ALWAYS THOUGHT THE TRANSFORMING CHARACTERS OF BLOODY ROAR WERE COOL, AND I'D LOVE TO SEE THE SERIES RETURN.

Noel
99
Taokaka

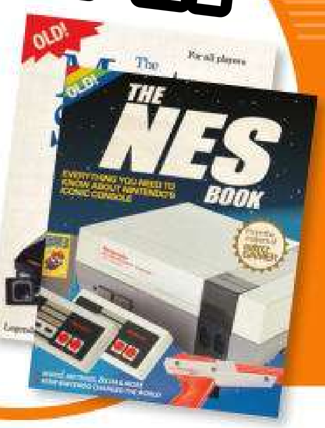
[XBOX 360] NOEL VS TAOKAKA WAS A FREQUENT FIXTURE IN MY HOUSEHOLD CIRCA 2012, AND I LOVED THE COMPETITION.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

FLAWED BUT FUN

Dear Darran,
I love your magazine and you do a fantastic job of revisiting classic games across a variety of systems and genres. You do some truly sterling work and your mag is the first place I turn to when I'm looking for a classic game to play. Sometimes though, I'm in the mood for something janky. You know what I mean, those games that play well enough, but have something about them that stop them from being considered classics. It would be brilliant if **Retro Gamer** could dedicate an article to these unloved games, or even better, write a monthly column about them.

We all have guilty pleasures that we know aren't particularly good, but we enjoy them nonetheless and it would be interesting to see what games you and the rest of the team enjoy. I know you covered this a few months back in a Hot Topic, but I feel there's a chance to create something that really allows you to delve into the essence of games like *STALKER* or *Dynasty Warriors 4* (two of my personal favourites).

Yours faithfully,
Gavin Baker

We're glad you enjoy the magazine, Gavin. We think you actually make a good point and there's certainly room in the magazine for what you're suggesting. Darran recently completed the 2010 reboot of *Splatterhouse*, and while it's clearly not a great game, he still had plenty of fun with it. This feels like a job for Nick, so we'll have a think and see what we can come up with. Thanks very much for the great suggestion.

» [Xbox 360] The new *Splatterhouse* is a bit of a mess, but Darran still had fun with it.

FEEL THE FORCE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I enjoyed the recent article on *Star Wars* games and had not realised there were so many across the different formats. The first ones I ever owned were *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Death Star Battle* on Atari 2600, although nowadays I still regularly play *Empire At War* – my favourite game of all time from the franchise – and *Battlefront II*, which gives me the immense satisfaction of being able to shoot Jawas and Ewoks in the head! I also own the *Star Wars* related tables on *Zen Pinball* for my PS3.

The *Star Wars* cinematic trilogies may have concluded but with numerous spin-offs planned and series such as *The Mandalorian* still going strong, it looks like that galaxy from far, far away is likely to run and run. Hopefully, so shall it be with the games!

Yours faithfully,
D O'Conner

» [Atari 2600] D O'Conner has fond memories of taking down AT-ATs in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

We're glad you liked the *Star Wars* feature and you've got great taste in pinball games as well. We've never featured *Empire At War* in-depth, so maybe that's an article for another issue.

MAGIC WANTED

Hi **Retro Gamer** team,
Well done for consistently producing an entertaining and nostalgic read, not just during the pandemic, but for as long as I have been reading (it's getting on for more years than I wish to count).

I do have a couple of suggestions, if I may be cheeky enough to ask (and apologies if I have missed any articles from the early days when I wasn't a subscriber). I would be delighted for your magic to be applied to features on the *Virtua Striker* series, and the adventure games System Sacom produced for Sega (namely the *Mansion Of Hidden Souls* games and *Torico*). They're all somewhat flawed, but very enjoyable games, and distinctly memorable for different reasons from my younger years. (You probably won't be surprised that I thought the recent feature on *Fighters Megamix* was great!)

Best Regards,
Shahin

Nick's a big fan of anything Sega-related, so I'm sure we can persuade him to look into your requests, Shahin. If we can't get suitable access maybe we can revisit the games in another way. Leave it with us.

TIME TO COTTON ON

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Will you be doing anything on the *Cotton* series of videogames in the near future? It's not only a great series of shooters, but nearly every single game in the series is now available via modern systems like the Switch and PS4 and it's currently celebrating its 30th anniversary. I know Japanese access isn't always easy, but it would be brilliant if you could look back at every game in the franchise and maybe even run a cover feature on the series.

Yours hopefully,
Ben Jenkins

» [Switch] Nearly every *Cotton* game is now available on Switch in some form, which is a pretty impressive feat.

BARK
41 89
JACKY

» [Saturn] Shahin enjoyed our *Fighters Megamix* coverage and would like something on *Virtua Striker* next.

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We're glad you enjoy the *Cotton* series, Ben. If we can get some suitable access we'll certainly consider it. We also agree that it's nice to have so much access to the series on contemporary consoles.

GETTING VIRTUAL

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Thanks for your great review of *Resident Evil 4 VR* in issue 227. Given the surge in sales for the Oculus Quest 2 over the last year, I wondered if you'd considered a retro look back at the history of VR? I'd be interested in finding out who the pioneers were, and what went wrong with VR in the Nineties, including failed attempts to bring the technology into homes, such as with Nintendo's Virtual Boy. There are also a slew of retro conversions and clones on VR headsets which you could highlight. In spite of your excellent reviews, readers may not have fully appreciated that they can now play *Puzzle Bobble* and *Myst* from the inside. With the Oculus brand rapidly being consigned to history as a result of Facebook's 'Meta' rebrand, it may be the time to reflect how far the medium has come.

Kind regards

Dan Owens

We're glad you enjoyed the review, Dan. We did do a small piece on VR back in issue 200, but we're sure there's scope to do something bigger. We'd also love to revisit the many weird arcade games that came out in the mid-Nineties.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Xbox 360

Darran is once again having one of those moments where he's hoovering up cheap games left, right and centre while Nick and the rest of the team simply roll their eyes and let him get on with it. He's spent most breaks banging on about *Splatterhouse* and moaning about *After Burner: Climax* not being compatible with the Series X.

SIGN O' THE TIMES

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

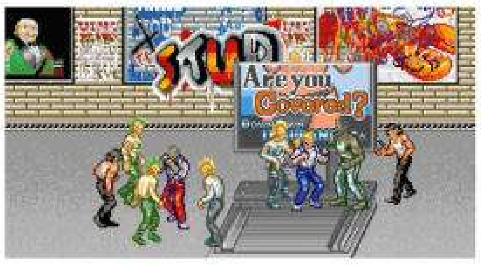
I'm trying to remember an old game from my youth and was wondering if you could help me out. It's a side-scrolling fighter in a subway setting and one of the bosses is a punk who wields a big pipe. The only other thing I can remember is that there's an advertising board that squashes you when you walk under it. I'd love to know what this game is again so I can play it.

Yours hopefully,

James Turner

You're in luck, James. We're confident that the game you're talking about is Konami's *Crime Fighters*. It's currently available on PS4 and Switch for a not unreasonable £6.29.

» [Oculus Quest 2] We loved *Resident Evil 4* in VR and hope other classics get similar treatment.



» [Switch] Here's an image of the sign that James can remember. You'll be squashed if it falls on you.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite game in the Micro Machines series?

» [PC] Micro Machines 2 was a huge hit for Codemasters and popular with our readers as well.

Stuart Gipp
It's got to be *V3*. Fond memories of laughing ourselves into absolute hysterics falling off the sandcastle over and over again

Alex
Micro Maniacs all the way. A great game concept that tragically hasn't been tried again.

MrMidLife
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament on the Mega Drive. The J-Cart was an inspired bit of kit for multiplayer on a budget.

Ironknut
Tough call between *Micro Machines: Turbo Tournament '96* on Mega Drive and *Micro Machines V3* on PlayStation. I have to go for the former, having spent hours on one-lap time trials. I honestly think some of my times are still hard to beat three years on, plus it was always the go-to multiplayer game with friends.

Tom Clark
Micro Machines: Military on the Mega Drive. Using the weapons to bump your opponent into the side of the track and wreck their run was hugely satisfying. It ended that friendship, but the J-Cart meant you had two more friends to spare.

Joe Dillon
Probably still *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* because all we ever needed was to alternate between Turbo Turns and jostling on the sponge of Ferry Fiasco and we were happy all evening.

Craig Taylor
Micro Machines 2 on the PC was so much fun, I'd spend hours making devious tracks out of cans of pop for my friend, and he'd do the same back!

Carl Harrison
Either the first one or *Turbo Tournament* with the J-Cart (both Mega Drive). I think the first one maybe pips it because I didn't expect it to be so fun and I think the new *Hot Wheels* game follows a similar trend.

James Gow
Bouncing off the spiderwebs in Basement Bumps in *Micro Machines 2* is the stuff of legends. *Micro Machines: Military* is pretty fun as well.

RetroBob
I like the simplicity of the first one, though I do enjoy blasting other racers in *Micro Machines: Military.*

Lukémon
Any answer that is not *Micro Machines 2* is objectively incorrect. Best game of all time.

Simon Boggy Burton
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament on the Mega Drive. Four-player mayhem with the clever addition of two controller ports on the cartridge. Genius!

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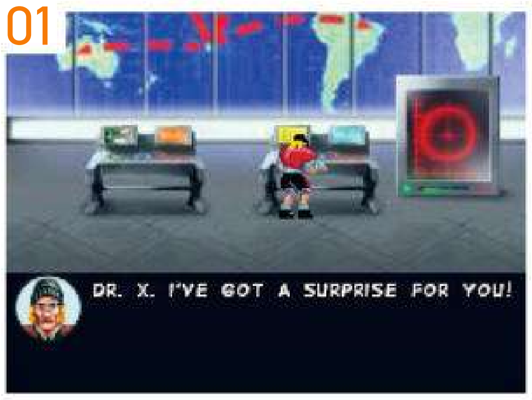
ENDGAME

ACTION MAN: ROBOT ATAK

GAME BOY ADVANCE
ACTION MAN
ROBOT ATAK
3+
ATARI
Nintendo

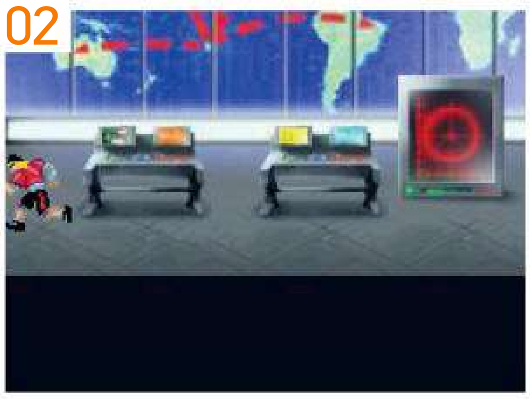
» Look, it's him! Action Man, the doll that's OK for boys to like because he does violence with firearms. Also, he's the star of a surprisingly good licensed Game Boy Advance game, which lets you do things like hit a dinosaur in the face. Anyway, Action Man has to defeat the evil Dr X – but since we've hit the fast forward button, he's already done it. Let's see what happens…

01



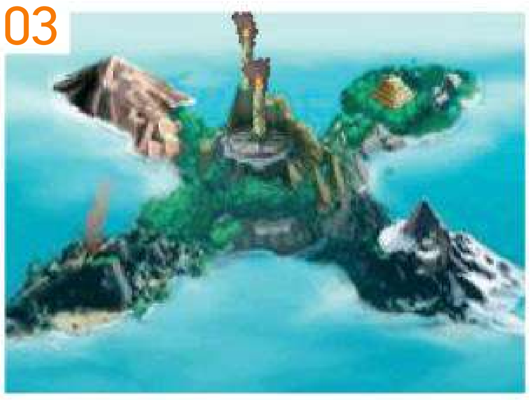
» Flynt has made it to Dr X's base, and while he's there he's decided that he'll bestow a present upon the evil megalomaniac. That's quite the gesture when you think about it – definitely the act of the bigger man.

02



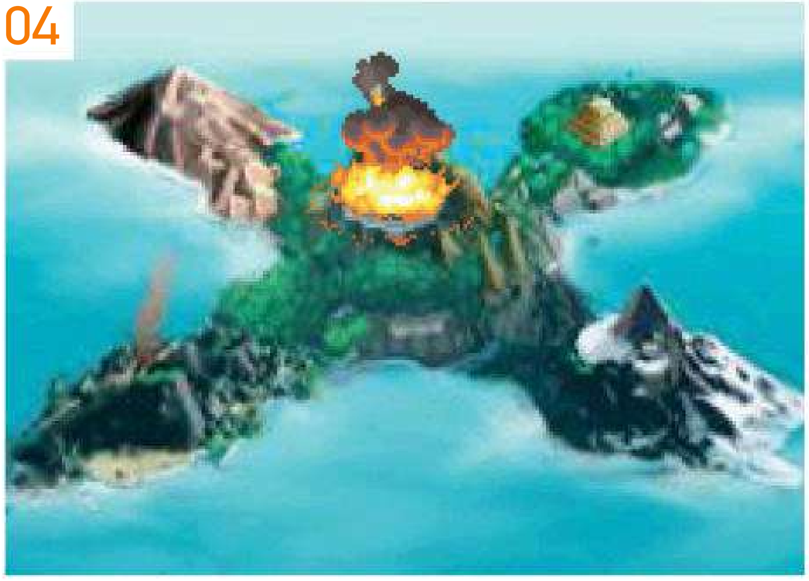
» Perhaps out of embarrassment, Flynt decides to do a runner. That's not going to help, – if you've already announced it in the base, he's probably got the whole thing on CCTV. Evil villains always have CCTV, they're pretty paranoid.

03



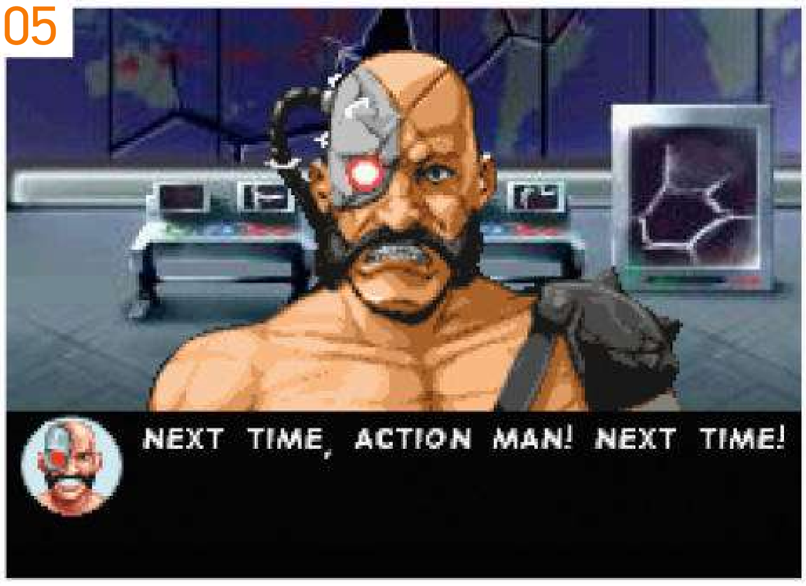
» We zoom out to see Dr X's conspicuous island base. If we were an evil villain with that name, we would immediately seek out a Z-shaped island. Nobody would possibly think to look for a villain named Dr X there.

04



» The bombs have exploded. Bombs would have been a brilliant gift – what evil scientist bent on world domination can't make use of a bomb or two? But they're rubbish once they've been detonated. You can't use them to blackmail any governments, and now the whole island is wrecked too.

05



» Turns out it was all a tremendously unfortunate misunderstanding. Dr X had actually requested bath bombs, but the first word got smudged. Worse yet, because the island has been ruined and the CCTV system is now very broken, Dr X blames the entire mishap on Action Man. He's innocent, doc!

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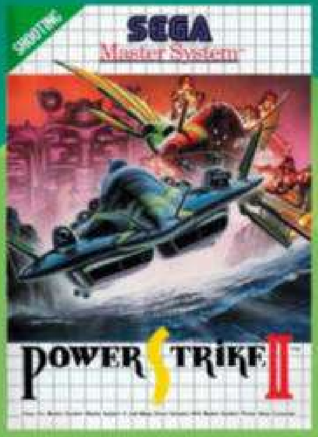

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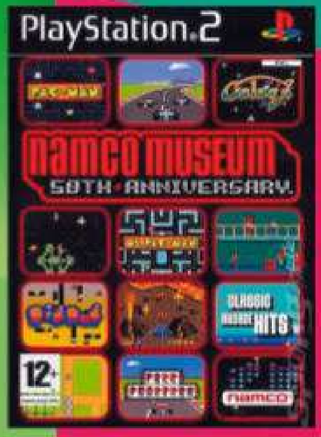

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